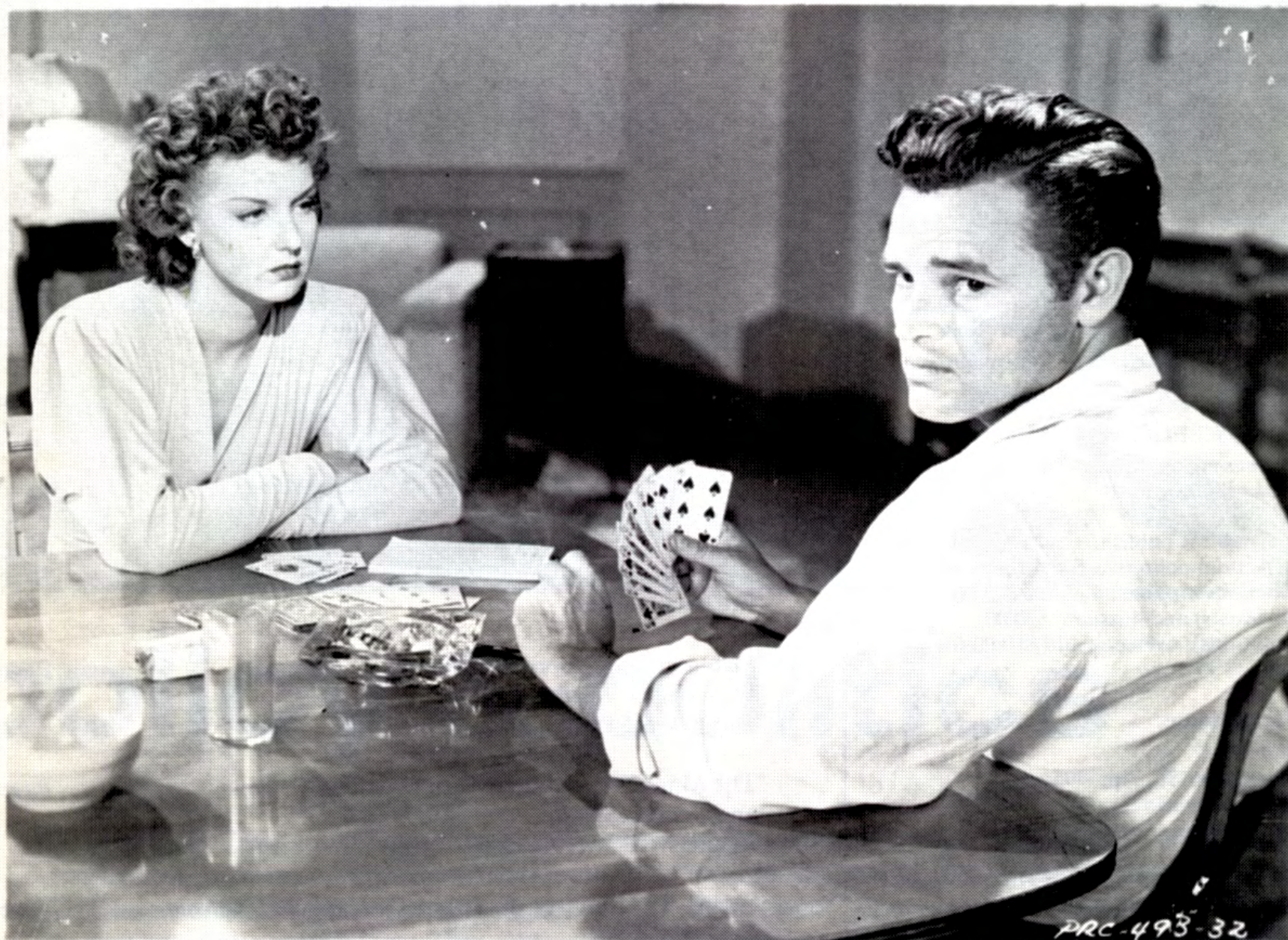


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No. 13/14
Summer '88



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FILM NOIR • FRITZ LANG
ANDREW BRITTON
ON POSTMODERNISM

CineAction!

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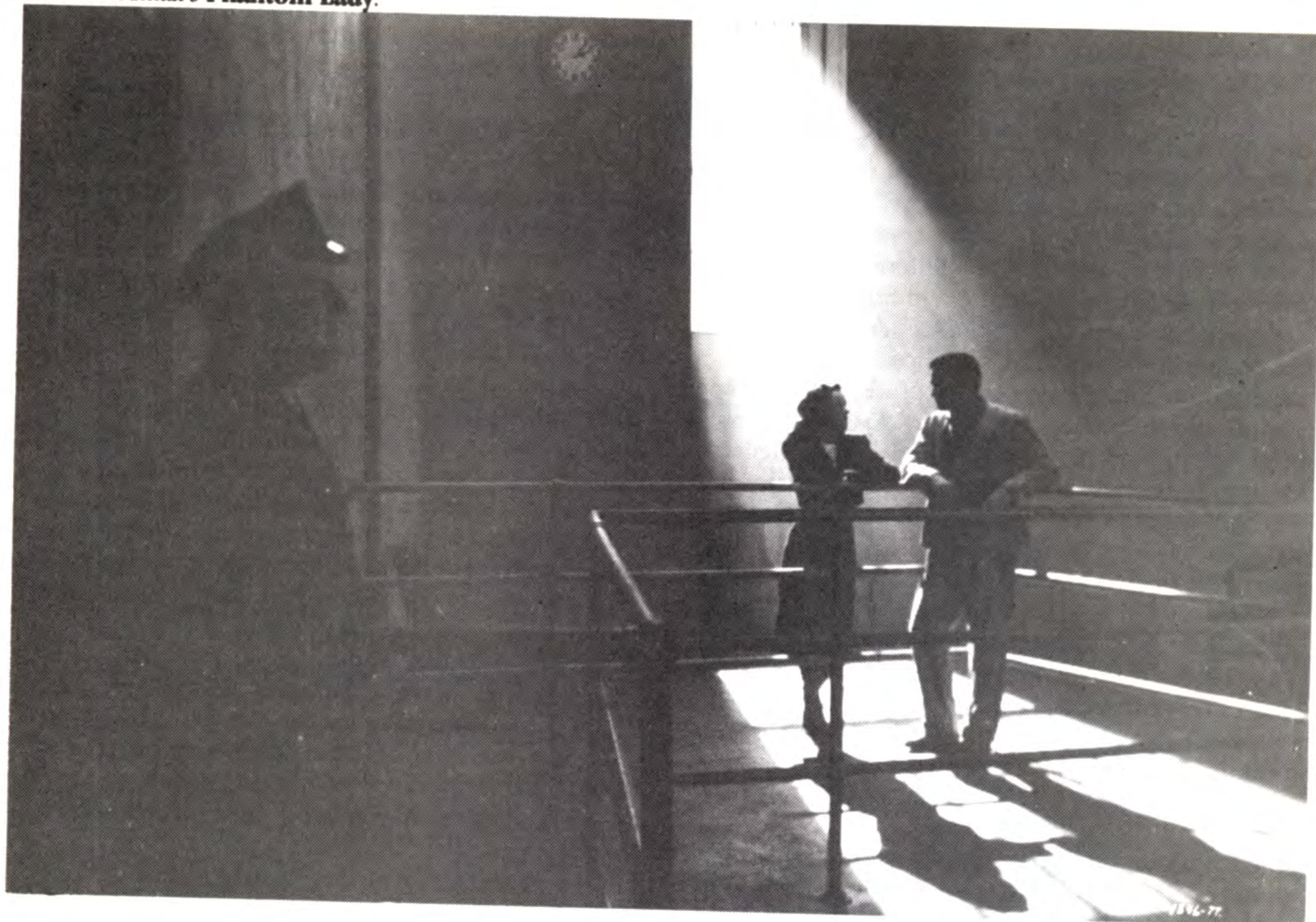
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policy & politics

WITH THIS ISSUE *CineAction!* begins its fourth year of publication. It seems an appropriate moment to give our readers a clearer view of what goes on behind the scenes: of our sense of our aims and methods, and of the divisions within the collective — divisions that we have all agreed should be foregrounded in the interests of public debate.

The reader will already know that two members of the collective volunteer (by proposing a theme) to edit each issue; those two are then solely responsible for that issue, with no interference from the rest of us, planning the contents, soliciting, selecting or rejecting articles, determining the critical approach and emphasis, choosing the stills. This will explain why each issue has — at least to some degree — its own individual tone and character. The collective is extremely heterogeneous, united by a commitment to the political left and to the major progressive social/political movements of our time (socialism and feminism in their various forms and manifestations, the gay/lesbian movement, the peace movement . . .), divided by disagreements over the most appropriate embodiment

of that commitment, by the range of possible answers (within the field of film) to Lenin's question, 'What is to be done?'

Four members of the collective form a particularly closeknit group with a clearcut sense of policy and purpose: ourselves, plus Andrew Britton and Florence Jacobowitz. This is by no means to be taken as implying that other individual members *lack* a sense of purpose — far from it. Neither should it be taken as suggesting that we feel isolated from, or antagonistic to, other members of the collective: the divisions are by no means clearly defined, the positions are not mutually exclusive, there is a great deal of overlap. But it seems fair to say that we are a more unified and homogeneous *group* than has arisen elsewhere within the collective: we are close friends, we meet regularly, we read and discuss each other's articles, we exchange and develop ideas and positions, so that our work has become increasingly collaborative. It is for us that this editorial, and this issue, speak — the issue as a whole representing the concrete embodiment of our policy and outlook.

We are united, first, by the fact that our primary interest is in mainstream cinema (the fictional narrative film, past, present and future) and that we regard with extreme scepticism the notion that 'classical realism' has been effectively discredited as a mere mouthpiece for bourgeois ideology and that the only valid critical interest for radicals is in the promotion of this or that *avant-garde*. It follows that we are also interested in the relationship of revolutionary politics to tradition — 'the great tradition,' to borrow an appropriately Leavisian title, of western culture. In the postmodernist era, this will appear to many an incongruous concern for persons professing some species of radicalism. But tradition, to us, is something more than a hoax perpetrated by bourgeois intellectuals or a museum of heterogeneous 'masterpieces,' and works of art are something more than assemblages of signifiers awaiting deconstruction. We recall that Marx repeatedly expressed his respect for the great achievements of bourgeois culture, and that Trotsky argued that revolutionary art must appropriate for its own uses the forms of bourgeois art. We do not in the least reject (any more than did Trotsky) the various forms of 'alternative' cinema — Third World, documentary, experimental, agitprop, locally produced and shown videos, etc.: they are necessary interventions that challenge the hegemony of a dominant practice which, by their nature, they cannot hope to displace or replace within any foreseeable future. Nor are we opposed to the inclusion in *CineAction!* of articles on such areas of filmmaking. It is all a matter of emphasis. Our first interest is in the general movement of our own culture during the past century, and we are therefore *primarily* concerned with investigating the films most people have access to (today, on video as well as in the theatres), rather than films which few have heard of, fewer have seen, and most have little chance of seeing. We also believe (as this issue amply demonstrates) that the classical Hollywood cinema has *not* been adequately accounted for, either by the 'Wisconsin formalists' or by feminist semiotics, or by deconstructionism, or by postmodernist cynicism.

We also view with scepticism the overall trajectory of the semiotics/structuralism movement (through Lacanian psychoanalysis into Derridean deconstruction), while honouring and trying to assimilate its less destructive and nihilistic lines of investigation. We repudiate (for political reasons) its growing academicism, the sense it increasingly projects of an inbred élite: we have tried, on this occasion, to produce an issue free of semiotic jargon (aside from those few terms — signifier, diegesis — that seem now to have entered the vocabulary of general critical discourse). We deplore (on political *and* personal grounds — remembering that 'the personal is political') the implications of Barthes' pronouncement (the seminal motif

— uncontested, as far as we know, within the semiotics movement — of all future developments) that 'The author does not write, he (sic) is written': we are fully aware of the ways in which ideology has structured us, but we wish to assume personal responsibility for what we say. We *write* (affected by whatever influences, conscious or unconscious: tradition again); we are not merely 'written' by ideology (the cop-out of the century). We particularly deplore the widespread and arrogant assumption that semiotics, structuralism and their variegated offspring represent the only valid radical approach to art.

This group within the collective has always seen *CineAction!* as continuing in (and hopefully developing) the tradition of *Movie*: especially, the politicized *Movie* of the '70s-'80s, sadly erratic in publication, though still in existence. We are happy to be publishing, in this issue, the work of so many writers associated with that magazine, and wish to foreground the fact that this is no coincidence. Like the *Movie* team, we believe strongly in the importance of *criticism*: we have had, over the last decade, so much theory, so much of it self-serving and self-congratulatory, manifesting the results of an excess of in-breeding. We are not of course *opposed* to the development of theoretical discourses (which would be ridiculous); we *are* concerned by the way in which the function of criticism (the interpretation and evaluation, from a variety of theoretical bases, of specific works, with the sense of value always paramount) has been lost in the proliferating theoretical effusions, with close readings (when they are offered) designed to demonstrate rather than test the validity of a theory. We are committed, as critics, to investigating the past of our culture in order to understand its present and evaluate its possible futures; and our investigations have led us to the conviction that far more of that past can be appropriated for progressive ends than most contemporary theory would have us believe.

We hope that future editors will take up issues we have raised here and argue for their divergent or contrary points of view. The next issue of *CineAction!* (on 'Interpretation') is currently being planned as a forum for debate and the presentation of such divergences. It will be written entirely by the collective, each member producing her/his theoretical or practical paper either discussing or demonstrating a position in relation to interpretation, in order to make manifest the range of positions that *CineAction!* somewhat uneasily encompasses. We would also welcome input from our readers as to the *kind* of magazine they would like *CineAction!* to be.

Robin Wood & Richard Lippe

THE MYTH OF POSTMODERNISM: The Bourgeois Intelligentsia in the Age of Reagan

for Claude

by Andrew Britton

“... is there never to be an end to petty bourgeois theorists making long-term adjustments to short-term situations?”

RAYMOND WILLIAMS, “The Road to Vitsebsk”
(*New Left Review* 158, July/August 1986)

“I remember when we were all reading Adam Smith. **There** is a book, now. I took in all the new ideas at one time —human perfectibility, now. But some say, history moves in circles; and that may be very well argued; I have argued it myself. The fact is, human reason may carry you a little too far — over the hedge, in fact. It carried me a good way at one time; but I saw it would not do. I pulled up; I pulled up in time. But not too hard. I have always been in favour of a little theory; we must have Thought; else we shall be landed back in the dark ages. But talking of books, there is Southey’s **Peninsular War**. I am reading that of a morning. You know Southey?”

MR. BROOKE in George Eliot’s **Middlemarch**, Chapter Two

During the last decade the concept of the "postmodern" has established itself securely as the reigning bourgeois intellectual fashion. Its empire has expanded as rapidly as Buonaparte's, and is ruled, indeed, in rather the same manner: one by one post-Marxism, post-feminism, post-capitalism, post-criticism, post-theory, post-sexuality — a whole tribe of discursive uncles, brothers-in-law and cousins-twice-removed of the buccaneering imperial adventurer has clawed its way to a little authority via his coat-tails. Whatever its philosophical merits, there is little doubt that this spectacular Thermidor "spells boff B.O.," as *Variety* would say if it were in this particular trade (which it very nearly is). Careers, reputations and money are being made, and the bright graduate student with an eye to professional advancement would be well-advised to commit to paper, as rapidly as possible (fashions being what they are), a learned post-thesis on "the postmodern whatever" or "postmodernism and such-and-such." As the flood of anthologies and special issues of theoretical journals shows no sign of abating, it is certainly sufficiently easy to gain access to an audience, and the criteria for success are sufficiently unexact. Ever since Fredric Jameson made his tour of the Bonaventura Hotel the urban picaresque has been much in vogue, and the fresh-faced academic postulant who aspires to work up an addition to his or her curriculum vitae is not called upon to do much more than take a turn or two in the downtown core of the local hyper-space and meditate on the condition of the postmodern city. Those of my readers who hesitate to believe that a genre has been born will have the pleasure and the profit of disabusing themselves when they dip into a recent issue of *Social Text* (Winter 1987/88) which includes the reports of no less than two such expeditions, the author of one of which describes himself, with a candour which is presumably intended to be disarming, as a "suburban *arri-viste*." It is even possible — or so I deduce from the collection of epigrams on the subject of "panic cinema" by Arthur Kroker and Michael Dorland which appeared in *CineAction!* 10 — that the time, the leg-work and the bus-fare required in order to research these *crépuscules du soir* represent an expenditure in excess of what is strictly required by the standards of contemporary cultivated discourse.

"6. PANIC CINEMA. Filmmakers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to see **through** it." (*CineAction!* 10, p. 5)

I would be very sorry to learn that any moderately ambitious young person with the advantage of a middle-class upbringing could not, in the space of 30 seconds, produce something at least as good.

The secret of this success (which Mr. Kroker, who is virtually an industry in himself, exemplifies; he has produced a couple of sizeable volumes in exactly the same vein) is less than obscure. Not since the days of "the global village" and "the medium is the message" have thinking persons had at their disposal a reputable vocabulary with quite the same degree of racy glamour — quite the same air of having been coined in an advertising agency to promote the ultimate hamburger or the automobile of the day after tomorrow. "A pioneering attempt to establish a 'postmodernism of resistance' as the new cutting edge," announces Stanley Aronowitz à propos one of the most widely-handled collections on postmodern culture, *The Anti-Aesthetic* — an encomium which the book's publishers, taking Mr. Aronowitz at his word, have understandably reprinted on the back cover as

the ideal puff. "Cutting edge" is itself a Madison Avenue phrase, and it must be especially gratifying to think of oneself as being on, or at, it in an age in which the professional intelligentsia has never been more conspicuously irrelevant to the way in which social life is actually conducted or, as a group, more thoroughly complicit with the values and institutions of the dominant culture.

We may properly begin with the question of what it is that we are supposed to be "post." The suggestions would sometimes seem to be that we are "post" the so-called "modern movement" in bourgeois high art; and by this reckoning I assume that "modernity" can be said to have begun at some point in the second half of the 19th century and to have ended during, or shortly after, the Second World War. There is, however, an alternative chronology which, while it is in general agreement with the first as to the moment when the "modern" *stopped*, maintains that it *started* considerably earlier — maintains, in fact, that "modernity" is roughly synonymous with what was once referred to, in a more primitive age, as "bourgeois culture." According to this argument, artistic "modernism," far from being "the modern" *tout court*, is actually the last fling of a larger "modern project" formulated by the first bourgeois intelligentsia during the Enlightenment — in a spirit which can now be seen to have been excessively sanguine.

This equivocation about what exactly modernity was is already sufficiently betraying, but the category is nothing if not elastic and we discover, as we peruse the relevant literature, that it has, like Topsy, a tendency to grow. Thus, for example, in a paper on "Feminists and Postmodernism" in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Craig Owens informs us:

"As recent analyses of the 'enunciative apparatus' of visual representation . . . confirm, the representational systems of the West admit only one vision — that of the constitutive male subject — or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine. The postmodernist work attempts to upset the reassuring stability of that mastering position." (*The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 58)

For Mr. Owens, "modernity" would appear to consist of the whole of human culture (the obligatory concession to the eastern hemisphere is merely prophylactic) prior to the date of his own birth.

We may agree with Fredric Jameson that

"... every position on postmodernism in culture — whether apologia or stigmatisation — is also at one and the same time, and **necessarily**, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today." (Jameson, *New Left Review* 146, p. 55)

The more interesting fact, however, is that it may be deduced from the extraordinary variety and instability of the definitions of "the modern" for which postmodernist theory is supremely remarkable that one of the things that is crucially at stake in the whole discourse is the contemporary bourgeois intellectual's sense of *the past*. Of course, the account of the past and the "implicitly or explicitly political" judgment of the present go together. In every case, the particular vision which we are offered both of the postmodern condition and of the obligations of the postmodern intellectual is rationalized by reference to a correlated fiction of the homogeneous content of "modernity."

While all the theorists of postmodernism with whom I will be concerned in this paper define themselves, often rather assertively, as radicals, they can be divided nonetheless into two quite distinct groups. The writers in the first

group, of whom Mr. Owens is representative, understand modernity (however defined) to be archaic and reactionary, and their affirmation of the postmodern is continuous with an orgiastic massacre of ancestors by means of which they enrol themselves imaginatively as members of the first true avant-garde. This celebratory postmodern discourse has its origins in French post-structuralism and its political logic is anti-Marxist: that is to say, the construction of the category of postmodernity *subverts* the construction of alibis for the repudiation of Marxism. The writers in the second group, of whom Mr. Jameson and Habermas are no doubt the most familiar, either are Marxists or are sympathetic to certain versions of Marxist ideas, and they propose a more or less nuanced negative critique of postmodern culture, which is perceived as the corollary of the advanced multinational capitalism which emerged, under US hegemony, in the period following the Second World War. I will argue at a later stage both that the concept of the postmodern is fundamentally incompatible with a Marxist discourse (as the concept's lineage might suggest) and that Marxist appropriations of it do little more than surreptitiously recapitulate the theory of cultural apocalypse which the original Frankfurt School derived from putative features of capitalist culture which pre-date World War II by some 100 years. It seems to me, indeed, that the very obvious similarities between Adorno's "culture industry" and the postmodern condition analyzed by Mr. Jameson (not to say Habermas) reflect a current, and very serious, blockage in Marxist thought about culture in general and *the commodity form of culture* in particular. Such considerations may be postponed for a while, however. The numerous promotional agents of postmodernism who regard themselves as the storm-troopers of a new, improved Enlightenment have a prior claim to our attention — for they, after all, are the inventors of the talismanic discursive object with which we are concerned.

Postmodernism as Enlightenment

While every major movement in culture and the arts involves a reaction against the conventions, values and assumptions of the previously dominant culture, the claims that are currently being made for the virtues of postmodernism differ in two crucial respects from, say, the repudiation of the Gothic during the Renaissance or the attack on 18th century norms of decorum and propriety by the artists and theorists of the Romantic movement. The first is the quite remarkable inclusiveness of the disapprobation of the past: the history of (western) culture from the moment at which modernity is deemed to begin would appear to boil down to a few rather gross, and rather basic, intellectual errors, endlessly re-marketed under a confusing variety of brand-names which has encouraged the innocent to suppose that there are substantive differences between the products. The second is the evident tendentiousness, and the curious lack of clarity and conviction, in the etching of the alternative — ultra-radical though it undoubtedly is — which postmodernism is supposed to represent. We find, on inspection, either that there is no alternative at all and that we are a little foolish (indeed, a little reactionary) to have imagined that there was, or that the account of it which we are given is sustained by nothing better than the conjurer's sleight-of-hand and a more or less consciously cynical bluff. There seems to

be some reason to suppose that these two things are intimately connected.

The postmodern epitaph for history is brief and crushing: Mr. Owens, taking his cue from Lyotard, needs no more than two sentences to dispose of four or five centuries of political struggle and intellectual labour.

"In fact, Lyotard diagnoses **the** postmodern condition as one in which the **grands récits** of modernity — the dialectic of spirit, the emancipation of the worker, the accumulation of wealth, the classless society — have all lost credibility. Lyotard defines a discourse as modern when it appeals to one or another of these **grands récits** for its legitimacy; the advent of postmodernity, then, signals a crisis in narrative's legitimizing function, its ability to compel consensus." (Owens, op. cit. p. 64)

Should a dissenting churl, from his or her station in what Chaucer calls "the lewednesse behinde" (a station to which I feel increasingly that I belong), attempt to point out to Mr. Owens that the accumulation of wealth and the class struggle, despite the fact that people have written about them, are material social processes rather than narratives, and that it is moreover possible (and even desirable) to distinguish politically between the practices and discourses of capitalism and socialism, Mr. Owens would have his answer ready.

"**Master narrative** — how else to translate Lyotard's **grand récit**? And in this translation we glimpse the terms of another analysis of modernity's demise, one that speaks not of the incompatibility of the various modern narratives, but instead of their fundamental solidarity. For what made the **grands récits** of modernity master narratives if not the fact that they were all narratives of mastery, of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature? What function did these narratives play other than to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image? And what form did this mission take if not that of man's placing of his stamp on everything that exists — that is, the transformation of the world into a representation, with man as its subject? In this respect, however, the phrase **master narrative** seems tautologous, since all narrative, by virtue of "its power to master the dispiriting effects of the corrosive force of the temporal process," may be narrative of mastery." (Owens, op. cit. pp. 65-66)

The "fundamental solidarity" of the discourses of modernity — and above all, of capitalism and Marxism — is indeed the leitmotif of the apology for postmodernism, and the significance of Mr. Owens' essay is that it shows us very clearly, with the confidence intimated by that astonishing cascade of rhetorical questions, what are the political consequences of the theory of representation-as-oppression which gained such currency in the 1970s and of which Colin McCabe's articles on "realism" and Laura Mulvey's on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" were the most influential examples. For *whom*, it might be asked, has the master narrative of the accumulation of wealth "lost credibility"? That it has no hold on M. Lyotard and Mr. Owens I will pay them the compliment of believing, but I am convinced that the directors of General Motors, IBM and AT&T take a quite different view of the matter, and that if the question were put to them they would be able to explain — with a brevity and passion in direct proportion to their lack of theoretical sophistication — exactly in what ways the ideal of the accumulation of wealth is to be distinguished from that of the classless society. The shattering discovery that capitalism and socialism are the same thing has escaped notice of the ruling class which, for reasons best known to itself, continues to act on the old-fashioned assumption that one of them is to be preferred to the other. For this obsti-

nate conservatism there is, perhaps, after all, an explanation: the belief that "western culture" consists of a handful of interchangeable narratives can only be enjoyed in the cloistered seclusion of the library (or its postmodern equivalent). Lyotard and Mr. Owens may well feel somewhat jaded about modernity and inclined to give the whole thing up as a bad job, but all the evidence suggests that capitalism is not.

Stanley Aronowitz recapitulates Mr. Owens' argument, very much more suavely, in a recent article on "postmodernism and politics." One of the "ineluctable features" of postmodern discourse, he tells us, is "*the rejection of universal reason as a foundation for human affairs*" (his italics).

"Reason in this sense is a series of rules of thought that any ideal rational person might adopt if his/her purpose was to achieve propositions of universal validity. Postmodern thought, on the contrary, is bound to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly **partial**. Indeed, one of the crucial features of discourse is the intimate tie between knowledge and interest, the latter being understood as a "standpoint" from which to grasp "reality". Putting these terms in inverted commas signifies the will to abandon scientificity, science as a set of propositions claiming validity by any given competent investigatory. What postmodernists deny is precisely this category of impartial competence. For competence is constituted as a series of exclusions — of women, of people of colour, of nature as a historical agent, of the truth value of art." (*Social Text* 18, p. 103)

The most immediately striking thing about this passage is its breathtaking hypocrisy. "The renunciation of foundational thought" is, of course, a key item in the postmodernist sales-pitch; but just as Lyotard's anathemas against the very idea of a *grand récit* do not prevent him from advancing one of the grandest ever concocted, so Mr. Aronowitz's disavowal of "impartial competence" sits cheek by jowl with a definition of reason, and (charmingly) of the "ineluctable" features of postmodernism, which is agreeable to the very criteria he claims to be rejecting. This contradiction may be unfortunate but it is hardly surprising. No human being ever uttered a public statement about the world which did not embody an appeal to a conceptual "foundation" independent of the speaker. Such an appeal is implicit in the use of language, and the notion of a form of thought which has renounced foundations is an illusion. This is not to say that every utterance enters an appeal in the court of "universal reason." Universal reason is a bourgeois myth which had no philosophical existence before Descartes (in whose work it appeared, historically, as a subversive category). Pre-Cartesian philosophies had a variety of different foundations, and as universal reason has come in for a good deal of criticism over the last 300 years from a number of points of view, Mr. Aronowitz's announcement that the *cogito* has its limitations seems somewhat ill-timed.

But then serious theoretical disputation is not in Mr. Aronowitz's line: the proposition that all "modern" philosophies take their stand on universal reason is so obviously ludicrous that we suspect that Cartesian rationalism is being used as a stalking-horse for something else, and so, indeed, it proves to be. Mr. Aronowitz's ploy is to identify "foundational thought" with rationalism and then to classify as rationalism the whole corpus of western philosophy between (at least) Descartes and the postmodernists. Strangely enough, however, having effected this monumental synthesis, Mr. Aronowitz shows no great interest in castigating Kant or Leibnitz or Wittgenstein: it is Marxism he is after:

"Fredric Jameson differs, of course, from Habermas in his criticism of post-modernism . . . Yet his critique is actually another version of

universal reason. Jameson does not establish the validity of marxism by defending it against postmodernity, but by invoking its categories to explain the phenomenon. Thus he preserves the most stunning element of marxist theory, its explanatory power." (Aronowitz, *ibid*, p. 103)

Mr. Aronowitz would not be caught dead invoking a category to explain anything. He prefers, as a representative postmodernist, to place "standpoint" and "reality" in quotation marks and to pretend to himself and his readers that he has achieved the Homeric feat of speaking "just for himself" in a public language which he did not invent. His elaborate repudiation of "foundational thought" and his candid admission of his partiality are, in fact, an ingenious way of claiming for himself the very impartial competence which he traduces in the arguments of others. It is the thought of *other people* which has the foundations. Postmodernist thought is *sui generis*, its objectivity and independence guaranteed by the exposure of the myopic foundational bias of the discourses of which the writer disapproves and the grace with which s/he adverts to the "intimate tie between knowledge and interest" — the intimacy expressing itself, in the most embarrassing cases, as autobiographical sweet-talk. The appeal of anti-foundationalism, in other words, is that it gives a new lease on life to one of the most dessicated myths of bourgeois scholarship — the myth of academic impartiality.

The political respectability of postmodernist theory is habitually secured by reference to what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call "the new social movements" — of which it can truly be said that had they not existed postmodernism would have been obliged to invent them. It is in the name of the disenfranchised — women, "people of colour," gays (yes, there is a good word for gays too) — that Mr. Aronowitz launches his attack on foundational thought, though why foundationalism should issue automatically in the "exclusion" of these unfortunates is not clear (at least, to me) from Mr. Aronowitz's essay. It might even be claimed that the validity of the proposition that "women are not inferior to men" can be established without an appeal to "universal reason as a foundation for human affairs," and I for one remain to be convinced that the political aims of the feminist movement can be realized on the basis of foundational "agnosticism." However this may be, one would have considerably greater sympathy for, and confidence in, the wave of sympathy for women and gays which seems to be sweeping the campuses of Europe and North America if it were not so often accompanied by red-baiting on the one hand and contempt for the working-class on the other.

"Marxism privileges the characteristically masculine activity of production as the **definitively human** activity (Marx: "men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence"); women, historically consigned to the spheres of nonproductive or reproductive labour, are thereby situated outside the society of male producers, in a state of nature." (Owens, *op. cit.* p. 63)

In a footnote to this passage, Mr. Owens is even clearer:

"Marxism's difficulty with feminism is not part of an ideological bias inherited from outside; rather, it is a structural effect of its privileging of production as the definitively human activity." (*ibid* p. 79)

We have reason to be suspicious of a supposedly feminist critique of Marx which rests on the astonishing proposition that women have always been excluded from the process of production as Marx defines it, and one's sense that there is

something in Mr. Owen's deployment of feminism which can only be called opportunistic is confirmed by his apparent ignorance of, or lack of interest in, the existence of large numbers of women who define themselves as Marxists. What are such women to deduce from Mr. Owens' essay as his explanation of *them*? No one will deny that there is a "patriarchal bias" in some Marxist text or that Marxism has on occasions had "difficulty" with feminism. Many women and men during the last century have devoted their time and energy to confronting, and attempting to overcome, this "difficulty," and while a univocally anti-Marxist feminism may be useful for the purposes of Mr. Owens' essay it remains a fictional construction of his own, which bears as little resemblance to the forms and contents of women's political struggles and feminist theory in the 20th century as it does to the existing corpus of Marxist literature. Part of the "difficulty" Mr. Owens mentions is attributable, not to the nasty masculinism of Marxism (and Marxists), but to the extreme difficulty of analyzing the way in which, in any given social formation, class and gender inequalities intersect and act on each other; and while, as Mr. Owens says, "sexual inequality cannot be reduced to an instance of economic exploitation" — an observation that will not come as news to anyone seriously interested in the subject — it is at least equally obvious that the struggle against women's oppression is unlikely to be furthered by the thesis that "economic exploitation" is intrinsically masculine.

Mr. Aronowitz and Laclau and Mouffe are also unhappy with Marx's "privileging" of class, especially his privileging of the *working* class. This unhappiness gives two quite different accounts of itself, and the discrepancy between them is very revealing. Thus Laclau and Mouffe tell us in the first place, as a matter of theoretical principle, that "there are no apriori privileged places in the anti-capitalist struggle," and that Marx was clearly incorrect when he assigned such a place to the proletariat ("Post-Marxism Without Apologies," *New Left Review* 166, p. 104). Mr. Aronowitz, while he admits (in one of my favourite phrases in the whole postmodernist literature) that "power tends to accrue to those possessing superior economic resources," is essentially in agreement. Despite this mysterious incremental "tendency" on power's part, "power distribution . . . does not obey any definite laws," and consequently Marx's conception of "the primacy of the accumulation process with its concomitant class differentiation and struggle" is erroneous (Aronowitz, op. cit. p. 107). Rather,

"There are many points of antagonism between capitalism and various sections of the population (environmental pollution, property development in certain areas, the arms race, the flow of capital from one region to another, etc.), and this means that we will have a variety of anti-capitalist struggles." (Laclau and Mouffe, op. cit.)

Whatever we might think of these arguments — and the fact that Laclau and Mouffe rest their case on a quite outrageous travesty of Marx's analysis of the objectively exploitative nature of the wage-form does not inspire confidence — it can at least be said that they do not deny the existence and the political significance of class struggle altogether. However, they co-exist with, and are flatly contradicted by, arguments of another kind, the tenor of which can be fairly represented by this:

"The history of the production of 'Man' (in the sense of human beings who are bearers of rights in their exclusive human capacity) is a recent history . . . and it has been one of the great achievements of our culture; to outline this history would be to reconstruct the various discursive surfaces where it has taken place — the juridical, educa-

tional, economic and other institutions, in which differences based on status, social class or wealth were progressively eliminated." (Laclau and Mouffe, op. cit. p. 104)

A page or two later we are informed that while Bernstein's projection of "future advances in the democratization of the State and of society . . . was, without any doubt, excessively simplistic and optimistic," he was nevertheless "fundamentally correct" in his intuition that workers were ceasing to be "proletarian" and becoming "citizens" (ibid, p. 105).

As descriptions of any observable state, process or tendency in capitalist society these remarks are so grotesque as to raise the question of why it is that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe — who, when I last heard of them, lived in Margaret Thatcher's Britain — do not immediately join the Conservative Party: the adjective "post-Marxist" seems altogether inadequate to designate a vision of history which might have been promulgated by the Tory Central Office in a pamphlet on the democratic consequences of the sale of council-housing. It would seem that the class struggle has been won — though no doubt a little "class discrimination" (betraying phrase!) continues to "limit the emergence and full validity of humanism" (ibid. p. 102) — and that it is not so much the case that the struggle of the working-class is one form of anti-capitalist struggle amongst others as that the material conditions which generate that struggle have been effectively abolished. Since this happy state of affairs appears to have been brought about by "the consolidation and democratic reform" of the capitalist state, and since the solvent of such political inequalities as continue to exist appears to consist of *more* consolidation and *more* reform, it is difficult to see in what sense the struggle of the working-class (or of anybody) can be thought of actually as being "anti-capitalist." How is it possible to conduct an anti-capitalist struggle through the medium of a state which is itself capitalist; or, conversely, if the struggle is indeed anti-capitalist, is it not reasonable to suppose that capitalism will do some struggling in its turn? Laclau and Mouffe never really address these questions — in part, perhaps, because their conception of "struggle" is so sedate: "everything depends," apparently,

"on a proliferation of public spaces of argumentation and decision whereby social agents are increasingly capable of self-management." (ibid, p. 104)

Laclau and Mouffe seem to think of capitalist society as a sort of extended Senior Combination Room in which free and equal citizens — some of whom, for reasons which remain unclear, are for the time being more free and equal than others — engage in "processes of argumentation which never lead to an ultimate foundation" (ibid. pp. 105-6) but as a result of which things in general miraculously improve. The basis for this improvement is as mysterious as the fact that any improvement is necessary, for Laclau and Mouffe's denial that the antagonism between capital and labour is intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production does not have the consequences they suppose it to have. They imagine themselves to be proving that the working-class, such as it is, has no privileged role in the democratic struggle: what they actually contrive to do is to theorize away the material basis for any form of oppression whatever within capitalist society. They tell us that such oppression exists in a multitude of forms, but they cannot tell us *why*, for their ingenious scheme of reforming capitalism and consolidating it at the same time obliges them to show — as they do, very effectively — that capitalist social relations are not objectively oppressive.

While Laclau and Mouffe can scarcely contain their enthusiasm for the democratic potential of the capitalist state and its striking contributions to the welfare of the working-class, their contempt for Marxism and Marxists knows no bounds; and Norman Geras's assertion — innocent enough, in all conscience — that "it is an axiom that socialism should be democratic" — provokes an outburst of Cold War anti-communism of which the *Sun* would be proud:

"Has Geras ever heard of Stalinism, of the one-party system, of press censorship, of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, of the Polish coup d'état, of the entry of Soviet tanks into Prague and Budapest?" (ibid. p. 101)

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have no excuse for failing to be aware that a Marxist critique of Stalinism has existed for as long as Stalinism itself, and this catalogue of specifically socialist atrocities — the addition to which of "press censorship" and, in the age of Reagan, "the one-party system," might be deemed to be tactless — seems especially distasteful in the context of an essay which fails in any way to distance itself from, or even to take cognizance of, the actual conduct of political life at any given moment in the history of capitalist society.

Mr. Aronowitz also takes a dim view of the workers (who have "lost their autonomous voice") and a favourable one of the "new social movements," but I would find it difficult to summarize what he wishes to tell us about them.

"Postmodern politics, then, takes as its object the pragmatic willingness of ruling groups to accommodate the demands of organized movements which, in turn, frame their own politics in terms set externally by the ruling class." (Aronowitz, op. cit. p. 107)

As a description of "the struggle for democratic power" in Latin America and South Africa — which Mr. Aronowitz goes on to offer as shining examples of postmodern politics in practice — this seems to be curious, if not bizarre; but I am still more bewildered by the proposition that the South African Union of Mineworkers "does not appeal to traditional class solidarity as its primary line of attack, but addresses *power itself* as an antagonist" (p. 113), or that, in South Africa, race has replaced class as a "detonator" of cultural contradictions (p. 110). The political significance of race in South Africa consists in the fact that the workers are black and the ruling class white, and the South African Union of Mineworkers is fighting not "*power itself*" (italicized by way of pretending that it means something) but the fascist form of the capitalist state. And what is one to make of Mr. Aronowitz's claim that

"unlike the bourgeois and socialist revolutions, which involved the marginalization of the Church from centers of power, base Christian communities — especially in Latin America — have placed the Catholic Church in the midst of the struggle for democratic power?" (ibid. p. 110)

The fact to which this formulation points is that large numbers of Latin American priests are socialists who interpret Christian theology in the light of Marxist politics — at the risk of excommunication by His Holiness, who, on his last South American jaunt, attempted to preach the virtues of chastity and poverty in a packed football stadium and was roundly booed.

Mr. Aronowitz might easily have spared himself these intellectual somersaults by ignoring the revolution in the Third World completely: his politics are hardly distinguishable from those of Laclau and Mouffe, who have the good sense, however, to steer clear of subjects which will oblige

them to pretend that the class struggle is really something else. In doing so, they also spare themselves the embarrassment of constructing a category of "postmodern politics" which defines every contemporary political struggle from that of the Sao Paulo metal-workers to that of North American ecologists as an example of a new form of resistance from which class has been "displaced" and which demonstrates the superannuation both of the proletariat and of Marxism. For if it is indeed the case that the workers have had their day and that socialism "is to be understood as an extension of the democratic revolution" (that is, as Mr. Aronowitz makes plain [p. 111] a nicer version of capitalism, including, of course, "its parliamentary forms"), then some way must indeed be found of convincing oneself that the anti-imperialist revolution is "nice" too, even at the expense of "displacing" its class character and inventing a progressive role for Catholicism — as opposed to the turbulent revolutionary priests who have so displeased the Vatican. Since Mr. Aronowitz seems to be so well disposed towards religious revivals as correctives to the perniciously secular character of "bourgeois and socialist" life, he may yet discover, I suppose, that Protestant fundamentalism has a vital contribution to make to the struggle for democracy in the United States, though I hardly think that even the postmodernist cause would be advanced by such an alliance.

The problem with Mr. Aronowitz's reasoning is the self-deception it entails. The revolution in the Third World is not a nice postmodern "democratic" movement "speaking a language of localism and regionalism" (p. 113) but a nasty class-struggle of the traditional kind; and alas, the workers of North America and Western Europe who appear to Mr. Aronowitz to have lost their autonomous voice are fighting the class struggle too. The results may not be as spectacular as he would wish, and it may well seem to him that the local proletariat has failed to come up to "requirements" — a word which, like "standpoint" and "reality," he astutely places in quotation marks (p. 114). When I last looked, Western workers were fighting tooth and nail — amidst mass unemployment, welfare cuts and confident capitalist *revanchisme* — to preserve those institutions and organizations, "characterised by a whole network of cultural affinities," which seem, from Mr. Aronowitz's coign of vantage, to have a merely "instrumental" character (p. 112); and the spectacle of professional middle-class intellectuals taking the labour movement in the advanced capitalist countries to task for failing to offer them "a vision of a better life," or assuming that because the working-class has not produced the revolution on cue it has thereby ceased to "make demands that challenge existing arrangements" (p. 114), seems to me so gross as virtually to defy eloquence.

As a gay man, I am the last person to underestimate the political significance of "the new social movements" — a form of words to which, it is only proper to add, I take the most extreme exception. There is nothing "new" about the political struggle against the oppression of gays, women and blacks (feminism, in fact, is rather older than socialism), and the phrase is nothing more than an opportunistic rhetorical convenience with the assistance of which a move to the right can be experienced, and promoted, as a new, higher form of radical commitment. The autonomous struggles of women, blacks and gays are politically crucial: they are not reducible to class struggle, and their goals will not automatically be realized by an anti-capitalist revolution, as we have good reason to know. It remains the case, however, that without an anti-capitalist revolution the goals of the black, gay and women's movements (not to mention the peace and the

'green' movements) will not be achieved — and the ideal of "equal democratic rights within class society," to which the programme of "the movements" is now so often reduced, is as banal as its consummation is unlikely. I am correspondingly opposed to the use of these movements as an alibi for McCarthyist jeremiads against Marx, Marxist theory and the Soviet Union; or as a means of patronizing the labour movement and wishing class struggle away; or as a support for the egregious illusion that, by dint of gradual reform and scrupulous argumentation between right-minded, "self-managing" persons, the inequalities of capitalist society can be transcended in a society which remains capitalist. The most striking feature of the development of the capitalist state in the last 20 years has been a growing repressive administrative centralism on the one hand, and a reduction, through "privatization" and cuts, of the state's socio-economic functions on the other, and the effect of this development has been, not to promote "democracy," but fiercely to exacerbate the most basic inequalities and the most fundamentally undemocratic aspects of capitalist society. Even if there were any evidence whatever that this trajectory will be reversed, the idea that capitalism would countenance the reform or abolition of those of its characteristics which constitute it as capitalist would remain ridiculous, and persons of good will who conspire to believe — in the age of Margaret Thatcher, Oliver North, Clause 28 and the Free Trade Bill — that the existing form of the state can be used to realize the democratic demands of gays, women, workers or anybody are doomed to yet further disillusionment.

In the 1960s Isaac Deutscher told an audience of American university students:

"You are effervescently active on the margin of social life, and the workers are passive right at the core of it. That is the tragedy of our society. If you do not deal with this contrast you will be defeated."
(Deutscher, **Marxism in Our Time**)

"Passive" seems to me the wrong word — though that the working class in the advanced capitalist countries is profoundly on the defensive and lacks, for understandable reasons, a sense of practical alternatives no one will dispute. Nevertheless, Deutscher's austere judgment retains its force. Faced with the "tragedy" he describes, it is certainly pleasant to cheer oneself up by claiming that the workers are no longer up to it, were probably never up to it in the first place, and that the "new social movements" will get the job done in record time by formulating anti-foundationalist democratic demands which the capitalist state will promptly meet. The reason for concerning oneself with this simple-minded fantasy is its catastrophic implications for concrete political strategy — implications which, as it happens, might be construed already: for all the anti-Stalinist invective of its proponents, "postmodern politics" is essentially Stalinist popular frontism under a different name. The "new social movements" deserve a rather better fate than to be co-opted as propaganda for a thrilling re-make of *that* ill-fated adventure.

The Museum

"In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo,"

T.S. ELIOT, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

If postmodern politics derive from the knowledge that "modernist political ideology" (that is — insofar as they can be distinguished — liberalism and Marx-

ism) is, like Bunbury, thoroughly exploded, post-art and post-criticism consist of the belief that Western culture is a vast junk-heap of miscellaneous *objets d'art* on the lines of Citizen Kane's cellar — though as we have renounced foundations there is, of course, no Rosebud. Here is Eugenio Donato, quoted approvingly by Douglas Crimp in an essay "on the Museum's Ruins":

"The set of objects the **Museum** contains is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe. . . . Such a fiction is the result of an uncritical belief in the notion that ordering and classifying, that is to say, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments, can produce a representational understanding of the world. Should the fiction disappear, there is nothing left of the **Museum** but "bric-à-brac," a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments of objects which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for the original objects or metaphorically for their representations." (Crimp, **The Anti-Aesthetic**, p. 49)

We are not to suppose from Mr. Crimp's hostility to the institution of the museum that he has any challenging new criteria of aesthetic or cultural value to propose: on the contrary, what he objects to is the "fiction" allegedly perpetuated by museums that one fragment is of greater (or lesser) consequence than another. It goes without saying that the brisk cancellation of the concept of value, like that of the concept of class in the discourse of "radical democracy," is presented to us as a revolutionary achievement, and Mr. Crimp begins his essay with an attack on the "moralising cultural conservatism" of the art critic Milton Kramer, who suggests (in a review which Mr. Crimp quotes) that Manet is a finer painter than Bouguereau and that there is something anomalous about hanging canvasses by these two artists under the same roof. It is the second of these claims that provides Mr. Crimp with his pretext, and one must admit (I suppose) that in this respect he has a point. Bouguereau's paintings, like Tennyson's epic poems, are documents in the history of taste which have, as such, certain (not, it seems to me, very great) interest and whose existence certainly deserves to be acknowledged in any comprehensive survey of the art of the period — if only, in the case of Tennyson's "charades from the Middle Ages" (as Gerard Manley Hopkins called them), by brief quotation. What Mr. Crimp really objects to, however, is the distinction between "document" and "masterpiece" — a distinction foisted on us, we are told, "throughout the era of modernism" (p. 50) and artificially preserved, in the postmodern era, within the museum's walls.

Mr. Crimp's very representative argument rests on two false assumptions: firstly, that it is sufficient to dispose of the concept of artistic value by pointing out that the value of a work of art is not "self-evident"; and secondly, that the art of the past has no order or coherence except that which is arbitrarily imposed upon it by an institution such as the museum or a discourse such as art history. It is so far from being the case that the superiority of Manet's *Olympia* to Bouguereau's *Early Morning* is "self-evident" that a person who knew nothing about painting in general and 19th century French painting in particular would not be in a position to adjudicate the subject: and since a value-judgment is an historical action by the person who judges there will never come a day when Manet's superiority to Bouguereau will have been "proved" in the mathematical sense. Works of art are also historical actions — and the greatness of *Olympia* was certainly not "self-evident" to the patrons of the Salon of 1865, who regarded it as a disgusting affront to all known moral and aesthetic standards. Inasmuch as it is

such action, a work of art cannot be detached from the history in which it intervened, and one's judgment of it will be continuous with one's understanding of what the nature of that intervention was. That museums have the effect of fetishizing art is obvious: in a bourgeois society, they are one of the means by which art is separated off from the public social world in which it originated and defined as 'other.' It hardly follows, however, that the only difference between a Manet and a Bouguereau is that the value of one of them has been inflated by the museum and the value of the other has not. There are no doubt people in the world who think Manet is great because they have been told that he is or because they have seen his works rather than Bouguereau's when they visited an art gallery, and these things tell us a great deal about the sizeable quotient of snobbery in bourgeois philistinism. They do not account for favourable judgments of Manet (Cézanne's, for example) which were arrived at on another basis and they do not explain away the demonstrable fact that Manet's and Bouguereau's relations to the artistic conventions and cultural values of their time were different. No doubt Manet's paintings have been fetishized by the bourgeois museum — from which we conclude that fetishization is one of the contents of the history of Manet's paintings: other social conditions can produce different conditions of reception — but the bourgeois museum cannot be used to demonstrate either that there *is* a difference in value between his work and Bouguereau's or that there is *not*.

The historical interest of "cultural documents" being in question, we can at least pay Mr. Crimp the compliment of saying that he has produced an interesting cultural document in his own right: he may not shed much light on the subject of art, but as an example of what I take to be the dominant contemporary taste in these matters his essay is really indispensable. We have become accustomed to hearing a great deal about the cultural debasement of the working classes — which has been, indeed, since the days in which Adorno lamented the obliviousness of "the common people" (as he called them) to "the wrong that is done them" by jazz and the Hollywood cinema, one of the grand themes of bourgeois critical theory. It puts in a reappearance (under another name) in Althusser's account of "the interpellation of the subject," from those iron laws the theorist, his epigones and his readers are miraculously exempt. We hear a good deal less about the cultural debasement of the bourgeoisie, despite the fact that the phenomenon is equally interesting. The postmodern intellectual tourist is a kind of cheerful, cultivated vandal for whom the bourgeois past, construed as "modernity," consists precisely of bric-à-brac — a collection of tacky gimcracks and gew-gaws none of which is clearly perceived, all of which are reducible to one another, and to each of which the tourist is in fact profoundly indifferent. He or she — insofar as s/he pays attention to these faded glories at all — finds in them nothing but the endless reiteration of a single, boring, bankrupt myth (representationalism, the myth of presence, phallocentrism) which, with the privilege of hindsight and a superior education, the keen tourist has seen through. In spite of this revelation, however, the tourist cannot conceive of a way of doing anything different:

"Few have produced new, 'positive' images of a revised femininity; to do so would simply supply and thereby prolong the life of the existing representational apparatus." (Owens, op. cit. p. 71)

All that remains, therefore, is to issue public notice of one's disengagement from, and one's knowingness about, the reactionary representational strategies characteristic of the

bourgeois hall of fame — which is what post-modern art amounts to.

The existence of a bourgeois intelligentsia which is blind to the most challenging and disturbing artefacts of its own culture, and which derives its conviction that it is a vanguard from displays of pure ironic distance from its own past, is a momentous new social fact, the significance of which asserts itself fairly plainly in this passage from Foucault (quoted, again approvingly, by Mr. Crimp):

"*Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* were perhaps the first "museum" paintings, the first paintings in European art that were less a response to the achievement of Giorgione, Raphael and Velazquez than an acknowledgment . . . of the new and substantial relationship of painting to itself, as a manifestation of the existence of museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquire in museums. In the same period (Flaubert's) *The Temptation (of St. Anthony)* was the first literary work to comprehend the greenish institutions where books are accumulated and where the slow and incontrovertible vegetation of learning quietly proliferates. Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum. . . . They erect their art within the archive. . . . every painting now belongs within the squared and massive surface of painting and all literary works are confined to the indefinite murmur of writing." (Michel Foucault, "Fantasia of the Library," quoted Crimp, op. cit. p. 47)

Before it could become apparent to Michel Foucault that Manet "erects his art within the archive," *Olympia* caused one of the greatest artistic scandals of the 19th century, and Flaubert was prosecuted in the French courts for publishing *Madame Bovary*, which he conceived from the outset in terms of a critique of the sort of art represented by *The Temptation*. The great advantage of solipsism, by contrast, is that it is unlikely to upset anybody, and the appropriation of Manet and Flaubert (of all people) for the genealogy of the postmodernist enterprise would almost be touching if it were less reprehensible. If the postmodernist aesthetic has been found so attractive it is because it provides such solipsism with impeccable political credentials and allows the artist and his/her audience (which is in general materially rather comfortable and wishes to remain so) to believe that an object which is to all intents and purposes purely decorative is also a critical intervention in contemporary culture. Anyone who doubts the validity of this diagnosis might well consider the odious General Idea AIDS poster, which is so patently convinced of its political responsibility, and which so patently reduces AIDS to an occasion for the production of a piece of tasteful, best-selling middle-class wallpaper. Postmodern art is the programme of a class-fraction which is no longer capable of expressing significant opposition to the dominant tendencies of capitalist society and which has no pressing interest in doing so, but which continues to spin fantasies of its own radicalism by facetiously debunking an erroneous model of the cultural past and attempting to politicize (without jeopardizing its chances at the box-office) the conventions of late 20th century fashion magazines and interior decoration.

The intellectual as dandy

The role of the postmodern intellectual is explicitly theorized by Derrida:

"We are today on the eve of Platonism. Which can also, naturally, be

thought of as the morning after Hegelianism. At that specific point, the **philosophia**, the **episteme**, are not "overturned," "rejected," "reined in," etc., in the name of something like writing; quite the contrary. But they are, according to a relation that philosophy would call **simulacrum**, according to a more subtle excess of truth, assumed and at the same time displaced into a completely different field, where one can still, but that's all, "mime absolute knowledge." (Jacques Derrida, **Dissemination**, pp. 107-8)

With a happy consciousness of his own casuistry (why not "the after-dinner sleep of historical materialism"?), the post-thinker embraces the necessity of dilettantism. It is all a game, and no more is required of the player than a certain bravura and talent for self-promotion. The dying words of the postmodern intellectual will be; like Cyrano's, "mon panache!" In his essay on the duties of the post-critic in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Gregory Ulmer earnestly develops the Master's hint and moves triumphantly towards an analogy between the contemporary intellectual and the saprophyte, which "lives off the decay of dead organisms in a way that makes life possible for living plants":

"The point is that if normal critics adhere to the model of the poem as living plant — the critic M.H. Abrams, for example, one of those accusing the deconstructors of being "parasites," whose **Mirror and the Lamp** provides the definitive study of the organic model in poetry — it might be useful to emblemize post-criticism as the saprophyte, growing among the roots of literature, feeding off the decay of tradition." (Ulmer, **The Anti-Aesthetic**, p. 106)

This is charmingly put: the intellectual is, or ought to be, knowingly bankrupt, but this bankruptcy remains, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in some unfathomable way *useful*. I am not quite sure (despite the example he gives) what Mr. Ulmer means by a "normal critic" — there being so many critics around who do not subscribe to the view that works of art are, or can properly be compared to, living plants. I will say, however, that there seems to me to be a close correspondence between the pernicious absurdity of the concept of criticism which is normal to *him* and Mr. Crimp's suggestion, elsewhere in the same volume, that Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet provide us with the paradigm of "the modernist intellectual," and that this correspondence sums up in itself the latest form of *la trahison des clercs*.

The Poverty of Critical Theory

No one, of course, would think of putting Fredric Jameson's work in the same category as that of the Arthur Krokors and the Douglas Crimps. Not only is Mr. Jameson trying to be serious, he also wishes to hold on to his Marxism; and in the context of contemporary North American academic life, where polite (and sometimes not so polite) forms of anti-Marxist sentiment are again becoming respectable, if not obligatory, this perverse endeavour commands our admiration and respect. And yet it is difficult not to feel (or so it seems to me) that the conditions in which the professional literary academic is now obliged to work have not taken their toll on Mr. Jameson too: who would have thought that the author of *The Prison House of Language* could ever have written a piece as muddled, as inconsequent, as eclectic and as question-begging as that lengthy disquisition on "the cultural logic of late capitalism"? (*New Left Review* 146). Mr. Jameson spares us Nietzsche, but he throws in everything else: Sontag on 'camp,' Burke and Kant on the sublime, Freud on the

uncanny, Williams on the residual and the emergent, Innis on space and time, Lacan on schizophrenia, Mandel on late capitalism, Mann on pastiche, Kevin Lynch on the city, Sartre on 'derealization': there is even what looks like the odd conciliatory gesture towards the Heidegger revival. It is precisely because Mr. Jameson is *not* a dilettante that this sort of dilettantism, when a figure of his distinction is betrayed into it, is hardly readable as a personal idiosyncrasy. He is, as I have said, very different from Arthur Kroker: but his writings on postmodernism must be referred to the same *niveau* which encourages Mr. Kroker to flit lightly from Sade to Margaret Atwood, from McLuhan to Mary Shelley, from Foucault to Aquinas, and then dole out the resulting cognitive soup as a Theory. There was a time when Mr. Jameson would have been able to resist the temptation to tell us that Vietnam was "the first postmodern war."

One cannot read any of the various versions of Mr. Jameson's thesis on postmodernism for long without encountering the feeling that one has read something rather like it before. If *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* does not suggest itself at once as the obvious model (or precedent), despite some pretty obvious parallels, that is in part because the *tone* is so very different. Adorno and Horkheimer did not feel in the least obliged to institute a search for a utopian moment in downtown Los Angeles, and it is safe to assume that if they had strayed into the lobby of the Bonaventure Hotel they would have been unable to share Mr. Jameson's pleasure in the design of John Portman's elevators. Nevertheless, when Mr. Jameson tells us that in the postmodern era "aesthetic production . . . has become integrated into commodity production generally" (op. cit. p. 56), we recall having been told in *The Dialectic* that this process of integration began in the second half of the 19th century (for Mr. Jameson, the very pinnacle of modernity) and that it was already complete before the outbreak of the Second World War. Again, while Mr. Jameson assures us that

"the culture of the simulacrum comes to **life** in a society where exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced . . ." (op. cit. p. 66)

— we have only to turn to "The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" to discover that as far as Adorno was concerned the concerts of the detestable Toscanini (one of his favourite *bêtes noires*) had already effaced the memory of use-value as long ago as 1938:

"If the commodity in general combines exchange-value and use-value, then the pure use-value, whose illusion the cultural goods must preserve in completely capitalist society, must be replaced by pure exchange-value, which precisely in its capacity as exchange-value deceptively takes over the function of use-value." (T.W. Adorno, in **Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism**, p. 279)

Furthermore, while Mr. Jameson is of the opinion that the elimination of "the enclaves of precapitalist organization (which capitalism) had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way" is one of the signal achievements of "the purer capitalism of our own time" (op. cit. p. 78), Adorno, inveighing against '30s hit-songs and bikinis, was in a position to announce the disappearance of "the last pre-capitalist residues" in the very same paragraph in which he mourns the extinction of use-value. As for "the death of the subject," Mr. Jameson's perception that

"the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older **anomie** of the centred subject may also mean, not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling" (op. cit., p. 64)

would scarcely have raised an eyebrow in the Institute of Social Research, which had already recorded the finding that

"the culture industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product." (*The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 127)

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when Mr. Jameson ventures a comment on music (and he ventures a comment on every art that he can think of) he avails himself of Adorno's distinction between "Schoenberg's innovative planification (and) Stravinsky's irrational eclecticism" and imparts to his readers the shattering *trouvaille* that "Stravinsky is the true precursor of postmodern cultural production." (op. cit. pp. 64-5)

"Irrational eclecticism" is not a happy phrase in the context of Mr. Jameson's essay — though of course, we are dealing with something rather more interesting than a case of plagiarism, or even of unconscious reminiscence. What that "something" is is betrayed here, in the essay's very first paragraph:

"The case (for the existence of postmodernism) depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950's or the early 1960's. As the word itself suggests, this break is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modern movement (or to its ideological or aesthetic repudiation). Thus, abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the modernist school of poetry . . . : all these are now seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them." (op. cit. pp. 53-4)

If Adorno had been asked to compile a list of the finest flowers of the modern movement he would not have included "the films of the great *auteurs*," and he would have greeted with astonishment Mr. Jameson's claim that the Beatles and the Stones represent the "high-modernist moment" of rock (I am astonished myself, though I trust for rather different reasons). Yet now, for Mr. Jameson, Hitchcock is a great "modernist" artist whose name one naturally mentions in the same breath as that, not only of a respectable European film-maker like Renoir, but also of a Rilke or a Lawrence or even a Stravinsky — despite his irrational eclecticism (*October* 17, p. 113: between the writing of this piece [1981] and the appearance of the *New Left Review* article Stravinsky appears to have been downgraded from an exemplary modernist to a post-modernist *avant la lettre*). How Hitchcock exemplifies the "essentially high-modernist" dislocation of "high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture" (*New Left Review*, op. cit. p. 54) I am not quite sure, but it is at least apparent that "what has happened" in the course of the half-century that separates Adorno's bilious denunciations of the Hollywood cinema from Mr. Jameson's writings on postmodernism is not that "aesthetic production . . . has become integrated into commodity production generally," but that the number and the type of cultural commodities which can be deemed to be artistically respectable has increased, and the moment of apocalyptic *coupure* at which the subject died, use-value was annihilated and the pre-capitalist enclaves ran up the white flag has been correspondingly moved forward. Adorno and Horkheimer, employing Walter Benjamin's terminology but exactly reversing the argument he developed with it, attribute these calamities to "the universal triumph of the rhythms of mechanical production and reproduction" (*The Dialectic*, op. cit. p. 134), and state categorically that the effacement of culture by the commodity form, the achieve-

ment of cultural "standardization" and the erasure of all distinctions "between the logic of the work and that of the social system" are phenomena of the *monopoly* phase of capital (ibid p. 121). Mr. Jameson, however, who likes Hitchcock and the Beatles, states equally categorically that the monopoly phase of capital and the triumphant rhythms of "machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90's of the 19th century" were the material basis of artistic modernism, and that the cultural catastrophe which, for some reason, Adorno and Horkheimer derived from the radio, the movie projector and the Ford assembly-line was actually engendered by the *multinational* phase of capital and "the machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40's of the 20th century" (*New Left Review*, op. cit. p. 78).

The only visible difference between Adorno's "culture industry" and Mr. Jameson's "postmodernism" is that Mr. Jameson makes a tentative concession to the idea of cultural contradiction, and instead of declaring bluntly that "all mass culture is identical" (*The Dialectic*, op. cit.) opts for the more modest claim that postmodernism is only the "cultural dominant . . . or hegemonic norm" of the current period (*New Left Review*, op. cit. p. 57). Unfortunately, his only reward for this dialectical gesture is that his argument, unlike Adorno's, ceases to make sense in its own terms. The "culture industry" thesis may be ludicrous, but it is at least consistent: a certain stage in capitalist commodity production is reached; culture is subordinated to it; disaster results. Mr. Jameson, on the other hand, aspires to offer us a reflection theory of culture which accommodates (under vague and totally untheorized circumstances) a certain activity on the part of the mirror, and a disaster with bits that are not disastrous. If postmodernism does indeed correspond to the multinational phase of capital, how was it possible for Stravinsky — and, apparently, Stein, Roussel and Duchamp as well — to be postmodernists *avant la lettre*? Conversely, what business did Hitchcock and the Rolling Stones have to produce modernist art in the 1950s and '60s? And if the individual subject is really dead, might not Mr. Jameson have spared us the final pages of his article, in which he meditates on the possibility of equipping this unfortunate zombie with a "cognitive map" of the postmodern world? What good the living dead will derive from their new-found ability (through the Virgilian ministrations of the Marxist intellectual) successfully to negotiate the lobby of the Bonaventure Hotel I am not quite sure, and to judge from the turgid word-spinning for which this section of his article is remarkable Mr. Jameson is not sure either — but it is always nice, I suppose, to end on a note of uplift. No one who reads through these innocent pages will have much trouble resisting the impulse — as they might well do on setting down *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* — to run straight to the bathroom and swallow a handful of barbiturates.

Premature announcements of the extinction of the lights of culture by the most recent development in commodity production are a staple feature of bourgeois thought on cultural subjects: since at least the end of the 18th century, every new cultural technology and every significant expansion of the audience interested in consuming cultural products has been greeted by somebody as a harbinger of the imminent triumph of barbarism. Coleridge was a great radical artist and one of the most intelligent men of his time, but his radicalism and his intelligence did not prevent him from writing this:

"For as to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their pass-time, or rather kill-time, with the name of reading. Call it rather a sort of beggarly day-dreaming, during which the mind

of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole **material** and imagery of the doze is supplied **ab extra** by a sort of mental **camera** obscura manufactured at the printing office, which **pro tempore** fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of a hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of common sense and all definite purpose." (*Biographia Literaria*, Chap. 22)

Coleridge's account of the novel and its readers is identical to Adorno's of Hollywood and its audience, and he is even a Lacanian film theorist — *avant la lettre*. The trouble with such edicts is that they require constant revision as bourgeois taste — perpetually between 50 and 100 years in arrears of the significant work which is actually being produced — gradually reconciles itself to the cultural products which embody the commodity form before last. Far from challenging the notion that the commodity form is the negation of culture, Marxist aestheticians have often tended to give it a new lease on life, and the philosophy of art with which we associate the Frankfurt School consists, explicitly, of an apology of the imputed autonomy of *Kultur*. It might have been hoped that the discovery that many Hollywood directors and many jazz musicians were geniuses would lead in its turn to the discovery that the lapsarian theory of cultural commodification stands in need of revision — but no. Instead, the films of Hitchcock and the music of Louis Armstrong, purged by time of the taint of the market, are elevated to the canon and more recent commodities take their place. The transition is easy, and the nature of the rhetoric which rationalizes it could be guessed in advance by an intelligent five-year-old. Here, for instance, is part of an exemplary postmodern Marxist discourse on "the political economy of music":

"Music did not really become a commodity until a broad market for popular music was created. Such a market did not exist when Edison invented the phonograph; it was produced by the colonization of black music by the American industrial apparatus. The history of this commodity expansion is exemplary. A music of revolt is transformed into a repetitive commodity. An explosion of youth — a hint of economic crisis in the middle of the great postwar economic boom — rapidly domesticated into consumption. From Jazz to Rock. Continuations of the same effort, always resumed and renewed, to alienate a liberatory will in order to produce a market, that is, supply and demand at the same time. . . . A music of the body, played and composed by all, jazz expressed the alienation of blacks. Whites would steal from them this creativity born of labour and the elementary forms of industrialization, and then turn around and sell it back. . . ." (Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, pp. 103-4)

Capital's effort, "always resumed and renewed," to alienate art's emancipatory potential on the market is as nothing to the effort expended by Marxist theoreticians in shifting around the date at which art "really" became a commodity. Students of the economic structure of the concert hall and the opera house in the 18th and 19th centuries (not to mention the Victorian evening around the pianoforte) will find M. Attali's chronology no more convincing, and no less arbitrary, than Adorno's, and they may also feel — despite, or perhaps because of it, his disingenuous recuperation of jazz at rock's expense — that if he had been writing in the 1930s, M. Attali would have produced something very similar to "The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." The lesson to be drawn, both from *Noise* and from Mr. Jameson's tortuous theorization of "the cultural logic of *late*" (rather than, as we had hitherto supposed, *monopoly*) capitalism, is that the time has very definitely

come for Marxist cultural analysis to abandon the idea that there was *ever* a moment of seismic rupture when culture became a mere function of the reproduction of the capitalist economy. Such ideas are perfectly at home in those devastating indictments of the appalling effects of the media which find their way periodically into the non-fiction best-seller lists, but Marxism can surely come up with something better. As a matter of fact, we have an excellent model to hand in the work of Raymond Williams, which seems to be sufficient in itself to dispose of the Frankfurt thesis for ever.

Pastiche, High Art and "mass" culture

It is perhaps because I am at least as unfavourably disposed as Mr. Jameson to much of what passes as "postmodern culture" that I find myself objecting so strongly to his account of it. Consider, for example, that concept of "pastiche" which he has put into circulation:

"The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal **style**, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche. . . . Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. . . . For with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style — what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints, as incomparable as your own body . . . — the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture." (*New Left Review* 146, pp. 64-5)

This is a little too neat to be true. Once upon a time, so the story goes, there was a group of individuals — Marcel Proust, Pablo Picasso, Alfred Hitchcock, Gustav Mahler, T.S. Eliot, and so on — who had "unique private worlds" to express. The "centred subject" having died from complications following the onset of multinational capitalism, there is nothing for the contemporary artist to do but to imitate the distinctive styles of the past (in another version of his essay included in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Mr. Jameson even goes so far as to suggest that the Mahlers and the Prousts have used all the distinctive styles up), and cultural producers who, all other things being equal, would be painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* or directing *Vertigo* or writing *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* find themselves instead painting the collected works of Gilbert and George, directing *Blue Velvet* and writing *Writing for the Second time through "Finnegan's Wake"*.

The first point to make about this astonishing argument is that no artist, 'modernist' or other, has *ever* had a "unique private world" to express, and "unique private worlds" were *not* what Mahler, Hitchcock and Proust were expressing. A great artist's "style" is not, and is not like, a "fingerprint": it is an instrument for the critical interrogation of the existing social world — the world which includes and which shaped the artist's sensibility — and it is arrived at through a critical engagement with the existing conventions of representation and the structures of feeling and value which they embody. There may well have been a "high-modernist ideology of style," but this does not mean that "inimitable" artistic styles are somehow a prerogative of the modern movement — or for that matter, "the autonomous

bourgeois monad." Is Faulkner's "style" any more or less inimitable or distinctive than Chaucer's? Obviously not. No monad or "autonomous" ego (if such a quantity can be imagined) would be able to produce an artistic style at all, for the simple reason that such styles are not private dialects but inflections and developments, more or less radical, of historical discursive or representational norms which by definition precede any given representational act, and the various artistic styles of the modern movement can no more be referred to the hegemony of the "monad" than their disappearance can be referred to its death. In any case, the styles of Philip Glass and John Cage, or Gilbert and George and Andy Warhol, or Philippe Sollers and William Burroughs, seem to me quite as distinctive as those of any given "modernists," if immensely inferior; and Mr. Jameson is wholly mistaken if he believes (as he clearly does) that either the styles or the inferiority can be explained by postulating a social world in which distinctive utterance is objectively impossible. Gilbert and George do what they do, not because no one any longer has the kind of idiosyncratic personal consciousness which produces an *Olympia*, but from their own unembarrassed volition — and with the encouragement of a substantial public.

The bourgeois subject, of course, has not died at all; though on the other hand, the bourgeoisie as a class has undergone a very noticeable change, the nature of which can be suggested with the help of Adorno, who remarks (in that essay on "The Fetish Character in Music") that Schoenberg, as a representative "advanced" artist, has "renounced consumption." This form of words is typically misleading: Schoenberg did not "renounce consumption," and could not conceivably have done so. What he renounced was the only audience for the musical tradition in which he composed, which is a very different thing; and it should be added that the renunciation was mutual. We have become accustomed to think of the modern movement in the arts as "progressive" in relation to a dominant bourgeois culture which was "conservative," and while this opposition is attractive — and even, in a sense, accurate — we ought to be aware that it can also be construed as an antagonism, internal to the bourgeois tradition, between two conservatisms, the content of which is determined by two radically different understandings of what the tradition is and of what the necessary measures are to preserve its integrity and its dominance. Schoenberg thought that the logic of the tradition entailed the invention of serialism, which (as he himself puts it) would guarantee the supremacy of German music for a thousand years. The German bourgeoisie thought that it entailed the comic operas of Richard Strauss, which it eagerly consumed as fast as Strauss could churn them out, each more fatuous than the last. The condition of existence of "the modern movement" is the eruption of this class tension which had been developing since at least the end of the 18th century and which, by the end of the 19th, frequently amounted to open war — between a certain kind of bourgeois artist and the bourgeois audience, each voicing rival and incompatible claims to the stewardship of *the culture of the class as a whole*. In some cases, though by no means all (a point to which I'll return), the "advanced" artist and the "conservative" audience were united in their contemptuous hostility to those forms of cultural production which the bourgeois tradition could not countenance. Conventional literary taste deplored *The Wasteland* and Leavis's passionate advocacy of the "new bearings in English poetry," but conventional literary taste, Eliot and Leavis were at once deploring capitalist commercial culture and the debasement of the audiences who enjoyed it.

The difference between bourgeois high culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and bourgeois high culture now is that any similar ideological tension between professional artist and bourgeois audience is utterly inconceivable. On the one hand, the contemporary money-making middle-classes — yuppies of all ages — cannot be imagined as giving a two-penny damn about music, literature, painting or any other form of cultural activity, and show no interest whatever in guarding the integrity of the bourgeois tradition, of which they are massively ignorant. On the other hand, contemporary bourgeois artists are conspicuously unwilling to commit themselves to the political positions which, in the late 20th century, are the indispensable prerequisites of significant opposition to capitalist society. If we have no Schoenberg in 1988, it is not because the subject has died but because this *kind* of cultural intervention absolutely depends on the presence of an audience which is passionately concerned to hear something else and which is prepared to stage a riot when it is disappointed. For Schoenberg — who was not only a great artist and a hero but also a political reactionary, like so many of the major modernists — the production of important oppositional art did not entail articulate political opposition to capitalism because bourgeois culture was itself a battle-ground, and Schoenberg's "conservative" audience experienced the formal innovations of his music as political dissent — which, of course, in the given conditions, they effectively *were*, though they have in themselves no political content. The bourgeoisie will never again produce an audience for bourgeois high culture which is even remotely comparable to the audience whose fury stopped the first concert of dodecaphonic music halfway-through, and if the Second World War and its immediate aftermath *do* represent some sort of turning-point in this respect, the thing that they mark is the moment at which the bourgeois cultural tradition ceased to have any political significance for, and (therefore) ceased to play any appreciable part in the emotional life of, the bourgeoisie as a class. High culture is no longer a contested terrain — not because "the avant-garde was won," as is sometimes suggested, but because the bourgeoisie understands (quite correctly, from the point-of-view of its own immediate interests) that it is the culture of the market-place which matters: and it is hardly an accident that the transition to the characteristic post-war cultural forms was signalled by the destruction, through state action, of the economic base of the internally-capitalized Hollywood studio system, in the context of a political purge of its artistic personnel and the introduction of sponsored television. The battle-ground now — as we might have gathered from the state's preoccupation in recent years with the censorship of pornography and "video nasties," the proscription of "positive images" of homosexuals, the banning of memoirs which cast an unfortunate light on the activities of the capitalist secret police, and the troublesome corporate autonomy of non-sponsored broadcasting institutions — is not the concert-hall but the inventory of the local newsagent and, in general, the vulgar cultural life of the average front-room.

Where matters of taste are concerned, the most striking consequence of this development is the contemporary bourgeoisie's loathsome philistine indifference to its own cultural past — an indifference which large sections of its current intelligentsia share, reflect and perpetuate while experiencing it, at the same time, as the very latest thing in cultivated sophistication. Even if the theory of culture were in the least advanced by Mr. Jameson's contention that Stravinsky's neo-classical ballets, Stein's *The Making of Americans* and the art-work of Andy Warhol are representative of a single

phenomenon, "pastiche" is a quite inadequate word to describe the kind of art for which, in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens advance themselves as propagandists. We have had "pastiche" before — in the Elizabethan lyric, in Jacobean tragedy, in the 19th century string serenade, even (let it be said) in the serial compositions of Schoenberg, which are, perhaps, not so completely the antithesis of "Stravinsky's irrational eclecticism" as Mr. Jameson (on Adorno's less than reliable advice) supposes. What we have certainly *not* had is a professional cultural elite which constitutes itself as the vanguard of a culture to whose values it is incapable of offering the most feeble substantive challenge by the simple expedient of declaring to all who will listen that it knows all about them. What Mr. Jameson calls "pastiche" consists in fact of a flattering exchange of signals between the bourgeois artist and an audience that is only too happy to receive them and return them in kind — signals which enact some variant of the proposition, "We can see through that, can't we?"; or,

"We've heard that one before, haven't we?"; or, "That's a signifying practice that's had its day, isn't it?"; or, "We weren't found under a gooseberry bush, were we?" The examples of the work of Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and Martha Rosler with which Mr. Owens illustrates his article on "Feminists and Postmodernism" are classically exemplary of this simple semaphore, the function of which in these cases is to confirm the spectator's conviction that s/he already knows everything that there is to be known about the representation of women, Hollywood B movies and the iniquities of capitalism. Bourgeois high cultural production is now virtually synonymous with this sort of exercise, which is the artistic equivalent of what Derrida means — in his philosopher's way — by the "miming of absolute knowledge."

I will defer so far to my subject-matter as to illustrate my point with an autobiographical anecdote: it concerns the screening, last September at 9:30 in the morning, of Godard's *King Lear* at the Varsity cinema in Toronto, in the course of the Festival of Festivals. Despite the early hour, the cinema was packed almost to overflowing with persons whom I take to have been representative of the postmodern educated public — a public very different from the one I am accustomed to encounter in that auditorium — and it was apparent from the very first scenes, which are dedicated to exposing the stupidity of Norman Mailer and those well-known capitalist barbarians Golan and Globus, that M. Godard had another winner. In the publicities which preceded the unveiling of his masterpiece, M. Godard was careful to make a great point of the fact, not only that the film had been "stabbed in the back" by the truculent egotism of his collaborators, but also that he had never read Shakespeare's play and that he had seen it performed only once — and that in French. It is continuous with one's sense of the Godardian case that one should be in some doubt as to whether or not this latter claim is true. I suspect myself that it is *not* true — the film suggests that Godard's knowledge of the play is adequate to his purposes: but its veracity is not, in fact, the point. What matters is Godard's evident conviction that this is what his audience would like to hear, and his audience's evident satisfaction at being told (and by a great artist, too) that one does not really *need* to have read *King Lear* since one was obliged to do so at High School in order to reach the conclusion that the play, its author and the sanctimonious notions of Great Art, High Seriousness and Creative Genius which (of course) they represent are a load of the old malarkey.

In the foyer afterwards there was a great deal of predicta-

ble talk about "Brecht," whose name was ready to hand in explanation of the film's rag-week humour — ready to hand, in large part, because of the earlier work of M. Godard and his more influential critics, which has had its role to play in the fascinating process by which the distancing effect has been progressively reduced to a gratifying testimonial to the middle-class spectator's *suffisance*. The parties to the conversation in which I took a (minor) part were quite unable to give a satisfactory account of what it was they thought they were being distanced from, to what end — and of why, in particular, being "distanced" from *King Lear* should be felt in itself to be desirable. It was the distance they had come for — and it was the distance which, as usual and on cue, M. Godard provided: though as the days of '68 are long gone he is no longer advising us, as he did in *Vent d'Est*, to adopt the degree of distance required to blow up civilians in shopping malls (*autres temps, autres mœurs*) and has settled down, with every appearance of extreme contentment, in what may be called, following Gregory Ulmer, his "saprophyte" period. The only dissonant note in this orgy of bourgeois self-conceit was introduced, significantly enough, by two intruders from the world of mass culture — Burgess Meredith and, above all, Molly Ringwald — who were presumably too simple-minded to appreciate the nature of M. Godard's undertaking. Molly Ringwald's remarkable account of the part of Cordelia — or of what is left of it after Godard has finished alienating us by introducing characters who wonder (to the audience's delight) why the reconciliation scene was not scored by Miklos Rosza — suffices to remind us of those aspects of Shakespeare's text which must be thoroughly disavowed before M. Godard and his clientele can aggrandize themselves at Shakespeare's expense; and it is peculiarly fitting that such moments of contradiction as disfigure this seamless, complacent, trivial and utterly useless *kunstwerk* are generated by the discredited and oft-deconstructed capitalist institution of the star-system.

"Tradition," declared Mahler, "is mere slovenliness"; and in the sense of the word "tradition" which Mahler here intends (the Margaret Thatcher sense, we might say) he is clearly right. Yet Mahler knew that he belonged to a tradition, and indeed, he explicitly said that just as Wagner had "appropriated the means of expression" of the Beethoven symphony for the purposes of reinventing opera, so he now "avail(ed) himself of the expressive power gained for music by the achievement of Wagner." Schoenberg's attitude to Mahler was very similar. Neither Mahler nor Schoenberg could have believed — as the representative producer of bourgeois high culture now conspires (the word seems appropriate) to believe — that they were objectively external to the cultural traditions to which they belonged, and it was the fact that he knew that his own radical transformation of the musical language had, as its necessary precondition, the work of his great predecessors in the past that Mahler had a right to the expression, "tradition is mere slovenliness." The welcome feeling that one's relation to the cultural past is that of an amused spectator on the top of Mount Olympus is illusory, and in signifying that feeling Godard (to make him exemplary) does no more than to signify his incomprehension of what he sees and his blindness to the necessity of his own involvement with it — unless we concede that the sense of involvement manifests itself, through a return of the repressed, as self-disgust: Godard clearly despises himself, his film and the audience he flatters at least as much as he despises Shakespeare.

Similarly, when Theory tells us that all "realist" novels, by virtue of being "realist," homogenize and mystify the

social worlds they represent, or that western painting since the Renaissance is governed by one or two invariant structures which immerse the spectator in the patriarchal imaginary, it merely reproduces — for a reader who “does not know *King Lear*” — the sense of the past we can indulge any day, without Theory’s help, by settling down to a game of *Trivial Pursuit*. Indeed, the discourse of postmodernism as a whole reminds one of nothing so much as a game of *Trivial Pursuit* for highbrows.

As we have seen, Mr. Jameson makes a great deal of the fact (or assertion) that postmodernism has “(effaced) . . . the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture.” Nothing could be further from the truth: what is called “postmodern art” derives, on the contrary, from a concerted and systematic *reinforcement* of the category of bourgeois high culture, which is, in the 1980s, as wholly parasitic on capitalist commercial culture as it is on the high bourgeois tradition. Andy Warhol’s art-works of, or on, Monroe appropriate a figure who, in her work, embodied in the most complex and moving way some of the most profound contradictions of the culture which produced her, and transform her, with bland insolence, into a piece of *kunst* which may be read, at the spectator’s convenience, as a searing critique of the objectification of women or as a pleasant addition to the condominium wall. If Mr. Jameson is really interested in art which challenges the distinction between ‘high’ and popular or commercial culture, he should turn his attention not to “postmodernism” — which is in this respect quite plainly reactionary — but to certain tendencies in the modern movement and in the earlier Romantic tradition with which the modern movement is continuous. The critique of bourgeois poetic diction by the early Romantic poets in favour of a poetry which, in Wordsworth’s phrase, “addresses men in the language of men” and which draws on popular forms like the ballad and the folk lyric; the interest of so many 19th century composers in popular dance and song; the key Romantic art of book illustration, so directly tied to developments in capitalist technology and the expansion of the cultural market; the 19th century operatic tradition in Italy; the novels of Dickens; the paintings of Courbet, part of the scandal of which was generated by Courbet’s deployment of popular imagery; the music of Mahler, in whose Third Symphony that most prosaic of instruments the posthorn (pointedly not included in the bourgeois symphony orchestra) becomes, in one of the most magical moments of western music, the vehicle of the Sublime, and whose work as a whole suggests an attempt to abolish the boundary between high and popular culture by an act of will; the tales and novels of Conrad, in which the detective story and the nautical yarn are yoked by violence together with the Flaubertian conception of the art of the novel; the work of Brecht in the 1920s, and of the composers who collaborated with him — in none of these cases can we speak of a frontier between “high” and “popular/commercial” culture having been erected or jealously guarded or viewed as anything other than a nuisance and an impediment. The idea that from the end of the 18th century onwards an ever-widening gulf opens up between ‘serious’ culture and the culture of the market is a figment of Adorno’s imagination, which has had the very serious effect of obscuring the fact that one of the major impulses in a great deal of 19th century bourgeois art is to undermine the rules of decorum and propriety through which Enlightenment had sought to constitute art as a specialized practice with as few external contacts as possible.

This does not mean that Mahler and Conrad were not bourgeois artists producing bourgeois art, and it certainly

does not mean that we cannot point to Romantic and “modernist” artists who despised the culture of the market. What it does mean is that the bourgeois tradition is, from this point of view, profoundly contradictory, and we can neither invent an emancipatory role for, nor — alternatively — abuse “postmodern” artists for resisting categories which so many artists have resisted before them. As for the alleged incompatibility of “high modernism” and the capitalist media, we have only to turn to the classical Hollywood cinema and consider (for instance) *Psycho*, *Written on the Wind*, *While the City Sleeps*, *Blonde Venus*, *Now, Voyager*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Gaslight* to provide ourselves with the evidence that “high modernism” could, and once did, exist as a viable popular commercial culture.

Contemporary bourgeois cultural production, by contrast, suggests to me the resurrection of a pre-modernist, and pre-Romantic, concept of culture as a privileged realm of knowing experts; and if I for one (offered the choice) would prefer to spend the evening watching re-runs of *Falconcrest* and *The Price is Right* than reading Derrida, looking at recent Godard or listening to Philip Glass, it is because the popular television shows, ghastly as they are, do at least make contact with the way in which the majority of human beings in the North America of the 1980s actually lead their lives. *The Price is Right* may be awful, but it is, for better or worse, alive; whereas *Spurs*; *Nietzsche’s Styles*, *Untitled Film Still 1980*, *Je Vous Salue, Marie*, *The Decline of the American Empire*, *Wavelength*, *Einstein on the Beach* and *Persimmon*, which are fittingly representative of what bourgeois high culture has come down to, seem to me to have about as much vitality as a row of dead fish on a slab.

No one will suppose me to be undertaking a defence of game-shows or of the majority of contemporary “media” culture, which is also jaded, impoverished and solipsistic: I have discussed the phenomenon in an article on “Reaganite entertainment” in *Movie 31/32*. Many of the points which are most frequently made in this connection — the fragmentation of attention; the symbiosis of entertainment and sales promotion; the proliferation of “a world of media images,” and so on — are accurate, and it is clearly true that North American commercial television represents something specific to the new phase of multinational capital produced by the last war. We should be very clear, however, about what follows from these facts; and what most certainly does *not* follow is that monolithic Kafkaesque “hyperspace,” at once unreadably fragmented and perfectly coherent, conjured up by Mr. Jameson and by the breathless prose-poems of Mr. Kroker and M. Baudrillard. The derivative nature of these visions of the obscene delirium of communication, universal psychic burn-out and “panic” this, that and the other should be sufficient to warn us against them: Mr. Jameson, as we have seen, is a less rebarbative (and correspondingly more inconsistent) Adorno, and the Kroker/Baudrillard act is merely a dystopian version of the equally popular, and equally inane, turn which Marshall McLuhan took on the road a few years back under the catchy rubric “the global village” — a phrase of which Mr. Kroker’s “the absolute domination of parasitism-plus” is the disillusioned, and somewhat more cumbersome, equivalent. Insofar as these arguments, at their worst (of which, I repeat, Mr. Jameson is *not* exemplary) signify anything more than the reduction of critical thought to a display of tail-feathers, they reflect a querulous, snobbish disdain for the plebeian which seems to me most unfortunate: people live in the media world, and they are not, perhaps, so much its abject slaves as we sometimes like to think. Popular culture is in no sense reducible to the capitalist media, and even contemporary commercial

entertainment — though it is difficult to think of it, given the nature of the economic conditions, as producing the equivalent of a Hitchcock — retains a greater energy, and a greater potential for generating contradiction and resistance, than the airless world of bourgeois art described by Douglas Crimp.

It is for such a world — the world of an allegedly autonomous bourgeois culture — that Habermas, as the most distinguished living representative of the Frankfurt tradition, continues to apologize in his notes on "the incomplete project" of modernity in *The Anti-Aesthetic*:

"... when the containers of an autonomously developed cultural sphere are shattered, the contents get dispersed. Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow." (*The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 11)

This view of culture as a container with contents which can or cannot be dispersed seems to me curious in itself, but it is merely paradoxical that culture in this sense is what a staunch opponent of postmodernism should feel himself called upon to reaffirm.

Conclusion

The discourse of postmodernism offers us a number of visions of contemporary capitalism, ranging from the glorious new birth of difference posited (in their different ways) by Craig Owens and Mouffe and Laclau to the incomprehensible horror-show deducible from the streams of consciousness of Arthur Kroker and Jean Baudrillard. All the visionaries have one thing common: their complete inability to propose an intelligible strategy of cultural/political resistance to the social conditions they describe. They are unable to do so because the description is wrong. Late 20th century capitalism is neither a golden opportunity for democratic pluralism and bourgeois renaissance nor is it a phantasmagoric total-system peopled by grey somnambulists in thrall to the culture of the simulacrum. It is a form of capitalism which continues to be analyzable as such, and which is no more likely than capitalism has ever been either to realize the state of things in which its own objective contradictions and inequities can be transcended or to reduce its inhabitants to tractable mobiles who simply embody its own values and priorities. The triumphant re-emergence of the most antiquated ideologies of bourgeois reformism and intellectual vanguardism on the one hand, and of yet another version of the determinism of capitalist cultural technology on the other, may well tell us a great deal about the material situation, and the intellectual exhaustion, of the thinking classes, but they tell us nothing at all about the actually-existing social world and how to change it. The function of the concept of postmodernism is to define this world as unprecedented (for good or ill, according to taste) and then to deduce from it that it has an objective tendency to become democratic, that it has an objective tendency to rational authoritarian closure or that the whole of the past from which it has been extrapolated was a mistake, or a joke, or a confidence-trick which has at last been exposed. The concept is, in other words, both *un-* or (better) *anti-*historical and, despite being the latest thing, rather *passé*: there is nothing here that we have not heard before *à propos* conditions which had also been carefully dehistoricized and which were similarly perceived to be the *via reggia* to Heaven or to Hell. Such new elements as there are — the tendency to conscious casuistry and charlatanism,

and the readiness, under certain circumstances, to appropriate (for radical purposes) the odd rhetorical trope or demagogic formula from the dominant culture — can hardly be regarded as a great stride forward in human affairs.

I myself remain convinced that Marxist Socialism provides us with the best tools that we have both for analyzing capitalist society in concrete detail and (therefore) for devising practical ways to eliminate the structural impediments to an authentic democracy which capitalism embodies; but whether or not one agrees with this proposition, it can only be obvious (I would say) that the discourse of postmodernism represents the smoked-out butt-end of the kind of theory we have been required to think of as "progressive" for the last 20 years or so. In the space of two decades the western intelligentsia has — as George Eliot's Mr. Brooke would have put it — "gone into" everything: one by one, every conceivable hermeneutic and every conceivable subject — Hollywood and historical materialism, psychoanalysis and representational painting, the novel and Prague linguistics, feminism and Brecht, structuralism and textual pleasure, the higher mathematics and the lower television — has been taken down, dusted off, toyed with and used up. "Postmodernism" is the name for the state of bloated stupefaction which has very naturally followed from this glutton's feast, and if contemporary intellectuals feel themselves to be "post" it is for the excellent reason that they have consumed too much rich aliment in too short a time and the table is now bare. No single item on the menu was ever really tasted, let alone enjoyed, and in the retrospective, surfeited post-prandial haze the *épigrammes* de Saussure and the *macédoine* of historical materialism *à la mode*, the realist novel Valencia and the fillets of Lévi-Strauss en cocotte, all blur together to constitute the single category "western food." We may or we may not sympathize with the victims of this epidemic of discursive indigestion, but we are probably ill-advised to take them at their own word. Such extremities are notoriously incompatible with sober reflection. □

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FILM NOIR:

How Hollywood Deals With The Deviant Male

by Deborah Thomas

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE,
"WAKEFIELD"

I think you're swell, so long as I'm not your husband.

WALTER NEFF IN
DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1944)²

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS *FILM NOIR*? To understand the question, of course, is in part to presuppose an answer. To the extent that "*film noir*" is a meaningful term, we all know the sort of movies to which it refers. Critics have approached the subject from a variety of directions, defining it, in turn, as a precise visual style with respectable antecedents in German Expressionism, a style clearly distinguishable from, say, high melodrama à la 1950s Sirk; as a narrative/thematic complex with equally impressive literary antecedents in the so-called "hard-boiled" tradition; as a genre linked to the specificities of World War Two and its aftermath. Members of the cinema-going public may look back at their own experiences of such movies with nostalgia (a reaction whose oddity might well be explored in view of the pessimism of the genre), remembering the bleak urban setting, perhaps, or the world-weary narrators and inscrutable 'dames,' or the sense of psychological dislocation and impending doom. Most critics and viewers, whichever angle they stress, share a sense both of the essential male-centredness of the genre and of its

pervasive mood of anxiety (whether made manifest in visual or in narrative terms). I shall take this uneasy combination as my starting point. The question I wish to pose is a simple one: if *film noir* is a male fantasy, as has often been claimed,³ then why is anxiety so central to its mood? What does the post-war male have to be anxious about?

Is the answer, perhaps, a simple one as well? Janey Place links the disequilibrium emotional texture of the genre to male fears of sexuality, as embodied in the type of the "spider woman," in contrast to the redeeming woman who "offers the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities."⁴ Sylvia Harvey too makes reference to "a process of general disillusionment for many of those returning home after the war, in search of those values which they had fought to defend."⁵ Presumably, on this view, *film noir*'s function would be seen as one of managing anxiety, diminishing it in proportion to the extent to which the "spider woman" is submitted to male containment and control, and the male reinstated to his "right" and "proper" place. It is not so much anxiety, that is, as its dispersal which is seen to characterize *film noir*, and this is surely compatible with the wish-fulfilling function of a fantasy. There are a number of problems with this view, not least of which is the way in which the genre's anxiety pervades the entire fabric of such films, and does not merely accrue to its duplicitous women, appearing to linger on despite the resolutions of the narrative and the frequent restoration of its hero to his "rightful" place. I wish to suggest that, though the *femme fatale* is indeed a threat, she is no more so than the so-called "redemptive" woman intent on the hero's domestication and the restoration of the status quo.

The question of how a genre of wish-fulfillment can be simultaneously a genre of anxiety has been addressed by

Freud in connection with dreams, and his claims may be useful here: he sees the dreamer as an amalgamation of two people, one of whom repudiates and censors the other's wishes and thus derives no pleasure from their fulfillment. However, in anxiety dreams, such wishes are not distorted by the censoring mechanism of the mind, but appear fulfilled in undisguised fashion, resulting in the replacement of censorship by anxiety. Punishment dreams, on the other hand, though wish-fulfillments as well, represent the wishes, not of instinctual impulses but of "the critical, censoring and punishing agency in the mind."⁶ The protagonist of *film noir*, like the dreamer, is an ambiguous figure (unlike the traditional problem-solving detective, on the one hand, or the gangster, on the other). He is caught between his conscience (which can be seen as an internalized version of American society's expectations of its men) and those desires which violate such norms and find expression, to a greater or lesser extent, in the films. This dividedness may be projected onto other characters who represent the separate aspects of the hero.

But there is a difficulty in determining exactly what "normal" masculinity entails, particularly in the post-war context of the 1940s and 1950s. Is it best exemplified by the rather pallid figure of the good husband and father in the all-American family? Or is it embodied in the man's man (the adventurer or soldier, say), to whom domestication is a threat? The latter view of masculinity, pushed to an extreme, becomes incompatible with the former, the returning soldier out of place in the family he had left behind. I would argue that much of Hollywood cinema has grappled more or less explicitly with a kind of male schizophrenia which both puts enormous pressure on men to be "normal" and yet represents such normality in contradictory terms. The war and its conclusion provided crisis points which

crystallized the contradiction in America's expectations of its men by imposing sudden and extreme shifts in the norms invoked. What was normal during the war — such as close male companionship, sanctioned killing, and “easier” and more casual sexual behaviour, all heightened by the constant possibility of one's own sudden death — became deviant in the context of post-war calm, though such elements lingered on in the *film noir* world as the focus both of longing and of dread. Post-war men had much to gain from returning to their previous secure position within society (and identifying with the law, rather than with lingering desires now become explicitly transgressive), but perhaps much to lose as well.

Fritz Lang's American films are exemplary in this context. Consider *While the City Sleeps* (1956) and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956). In the former film, Ed Mobley/Dana Andrews gets engaged to his respectable girlfriend Nancy, though it turns out to be a ploy on his part in order to set her up as bait for a murderer who will presumably undertake to kill her as a way of getting back at Mobley, a television newscaster.

In view of the consistent parallels which the film sets up between Mobley and the murderer, and given the fact that Nancy is shown both to refuse Ed's pre-marital advances while reacting stonily to his relationship with another sexually much more liberal rival Mildred, it is easy to read Ed's behaviour in setting Nancy up as expressive of an unacknowledged wish to be rid of her (his alter ego accomplishing the task he can't consciously admit to wanting). That Ed and Nancy finally marry, after the murderer is confronted by Ed in the underground and caught by the police, is testimony less of Ed's love for Nancy and desire for married life than of the bleakness of Lang's world view. Similarly, in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, it is arguable that Tom Garrett (Dana Andrews again) is threatened by his respectable fiancée Susan Spencer/Joan Fontaine, who dominated him both visually and by the appropriating of traditionally male prerogatives (“I've never seen your apartment.” “Isn't that supposed to be my line?” “But you've never used it.”) Again, Tom's killing of Patty can easily be read as a displacement of the desire to kill Susan, despite his conscious wish

to climb the ladder of social status through his marriage to her (the headline, “Dancer Strangled,” which announces Patty's death, follows on almost directly from the quirky scene where Susan has asked to “go dancing” in Tom's apartment). Thus, the film seems to be saying that Tom's desire for respectability, which the marriage to Susan would provide, exists side by side with an unacknowledged but potentially deadly antagonism toward her and her high-class world (“You get engaged to my daughter,” jokes Susan's father, “and all you can think of is capital punishment.”). Ironically, it is Susan who is finally responsible for Tom's being condemned to death at the end of the film, Nancy in the earlier film having merely condemned Ed to marriage. Both women act in the name of respectability.

It is interesting to note that many of the conflicts over which Lang's protagonists struggle are to do with their internalizations of traditional views on gender which conflict with less hide-bound, more amorphous desires. In *While the City Sleeps*, the murderer quite explicitly protests to his mother, “When you adopted me you wanted a



While the City Sleeps: Dana Andrews, Sally Forrest (Nancy), Thomas Mitchell, Ida Lupino (Mildred).

girl, didn't you? And he wanted a boy. Well, neither one of you was satisfied, were you?" Given the consistent parallels between him and Mobley, this suggests similar conflicts in the latter. In *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, Tom seems to feel threatened by Susan's appropriation of "male" roles, while at the same time not over-eager to take them on himself. *Blue Gardenia* (1953), a slightly earlier Lang film of this period, fairly openly foregrounds the way in which female stereotypes are matters of construction rather than nature, but the film also, less obviously perhaps, enacts the difficulties for men of fulfilling traditional male roles. This is especially evident in the character of Prebble — on the surface, the nearest thing the film has to a villain, but also its ultimate victim — who unsuccessfully attempts to live up to his false reputation as a womanizer (when asked whether he's successful in his role, a female character confides, "He is if you ask him."). This fundamental conflict for men between the burdensomeness and the privileges of their ordained position within the social world is perhaps most clearly set forth in *Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945). In a similar way to *While the City Sleeps* and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, these two earlier films can be seen as paired, both in terms of having the same actor as the central protagonist of each (Edward G. Robinson, instead of Dana Andrews) and in terms of this protagonist being restored to normality (although only apparently the better off for it) in one film of the pair, but destroyed in the other.

What I am claiming, and what I am suggesting these examples typify, is a tendency in *film noir* to dramatize a particular crisis in male identity which, though it is implicit in other genres and throughout the history of American film, appears with an especial vehemence in the context of a war which made such issues alive for many men. I shall be considering a range of filmic examples and some literary precursors, out of which I believe certain striking patterns will emerge. It is not my intention to say anything conclusive about *all films noirs*. Instead, I hope to show that a significant number of them share certain conflicts or anxieties, though not univocally, but rather as variations upon a theme. My main concern will be with the central male protagonist and his relationship both to narrative events and to the process of their narration. First, however, it is important to examine the contemporary urban setting of

film noir and the way in which this relates to the issues I intend to raise.

THE URBAN SETTING

AS MANY CRITICS have remarked, one of the most salient characteristics of *film noir* is its urban setting. The overwhelmingly negative view of this milieu which *film noir* takes for granted is by no means novel, but belongs to a long American intellectual tradition of antipathy towards the city. I would like to suggest that the characteristic anxiety provoked by the contemporary urban setting of *film noir* has its roots, at least in part, in a response to the waves of immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which seemed to make of the city no longer the locus of American "civilization" (a native version of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism) but rather of antithetical "otherness."

American civilization was linked to Europe in its origins and later development, but was also sharply distinguished from it as a thing of its own, and it was in the cities that a definition of "American-ness," of "us-ness" (as opposed to "them-ness") evolved. For Morton and Lucia White, the Civil War was a turning point. Before the Civil War, "the American city was between its period of colonial charm and its period of industrial chaos,"⁷ and criticism of it was by no means as virulent as it would later become or as criticism of the European city had already become. Such criticism as prevailed derived from a romanticism whereby the city was seen as *over-civilized* and inferior to the wilderness beyond it which, at that time, was still a viable alternative. After the Civil War, such romantic love of the wilderness was no longer central to the attacks on the American city made by intellectual anti-urbanites. The city became progressively seen as the place from which civilization was *absent*, this alleged absence of civilization largely linked to a sense of the city as an alien place.

Morton and Lucia White are undoubtedly correct in their caution that not all criticism of the American city can be attributed to "racism, nativism, or anti-Semitism"⁸ on the part of the critics, but it is nonetheless evident that many post-Civil-War anti-urbanists did link their fears to a sense of displacement or dispossession. Even many of those broad-minded intellectuals who welcomed the diversity which the city's immigrant population provided did not deny the importance of such heteroge-

neity as a constitutive aspect of the modern American city. In the post-Civil-War period, and in particular those years which followed the massive absorption of immigrants into the urban milieu in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the American city, whether deplored or extolled, was seen more and more as a contrast to the white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism which underlay earlier definitions of "American-ness." Thus, cities were seen either (where criticized) as un-American and alien, or (where praised) as forging a new definition of American civilization in terms of the very diversity — and no longer homogeneity — of their populations.

In general, to the extent that critics put the emphasis on "otherness," the immigrant groups singled out for comment tended to those most in contrast with the "us-ness" of American civilization as heretofore defined — thus, relative to the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant version of "American-ness," Irish and Italian Catholics, Jews, and, in recent years, blacks and Hispanics, lent themselves more readily to the position of aliens than white protestant immigrants from northern Europe. It is partly for this reason, presumably, that "otherness" became largely associated with the cities for, although there was immigration to rural areas as well, it was associated more with groups like the Scandinavians, rather than, say, the Jews.⁹ Of course, insofar as the immigrants themselves found a voice with which to express their own experiences, a point of view developed in opposition to that of already well-established English-speaking citizens to whom they were a threat. To the immigrants, the city was a threat as well, but from their point of view, what was threatening was the strangeness (to them) of America itself. Strangeness and familiarity are, of course, *relative* concepts, but the anti-urbanism which *film noir* takes on is generally one from whose vantage point blacks, women, and immigrants, among others — and not white male Americans — are strange. One point of view among many has become set up as absolute. A passage from Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* provides a good example:

Two more swing doors closed off the head of the stairs from whatever was beyond. The big man pushed them open lightly with his thumbs and we went into the room. It was a long narrow room, not very clean, not very bright, not very cheerful. In the corner a group of negroes chanted and chattered in the cone of light over

a crap table. There was a bar against the right hand wall. The rest of the room was mostly small round tables. There were a few customers, men and women, all negroes.

The chanting at the crap table stopped dead and the light over it jerked out. There was a sudden silence as heavy as a waterlogged boat. Eyes looked at us, chestnut coloured eyes, set in faces that ranged from grey to deep black. Heads turned slowly and the eyes in them glistened and stared in the dead alien silence of another race.¹⁰

This despite the fact that it is Marlowe and Malloy who are the strangers encroaching on black territory: it may not be their territory, but it is their narrative.

As the city was seen more and more to be the preserve of "alien" groups, so "normality" was seen to move with its exemplars to the suburbs and the Midwest, the latter, for example, more and more seen as "a place of limited vision, materialism, and conventional morality."¹¹ The so-called middle way of earlier pastoralists between corruption and savagery was reduced to the midwestern small town, their cultivated garden to that of the suburban home. Eventually, of course, many Jews and members of other immigrant groups became assimilated to such norms, blacks and Hispanics replacing them as the new urban scapegoats.

Film noir, in taking up this point of view, is defining as "reality" the world as perceived by the white American male, the genre's usual central protagonist. The world of *film noir*, in other words, is a relative one, filtered through the psychology of such a protagonist. So the fact of mass immigration into the urban milieu lends itself to appropriation by a particular point of view (that of the white American male), transforming such an external datum into a psychological response. Thus, the *film noir* city is no longer an objective rendition of American cities of the time (such "objectivity" being incompatible with the relativity of the city's presentation as an alien threat), but is more profitably understood as the projection outward of an internal terrain. The "real" city is significant less in itself than in the response it elicits. Of course, many classical Hollywood films belonging to genres other than *film noir* presuppose such a point of view. However, such subjectivity is built into the very structure of *film noir* with its frequent first-person narration, its dream-like episodes, and the sense of dispossession so often experienced by the genre's usual protagonist.

Let me recapitulate and extend my argument thus far. I have suggested that changes in the modern city's meaning have taken place in connection with its "invasion" by immigrant groups which has had the effect of eliciting either a condemnation of the city as a place alien to the values of American civilization or (for the more liberal) a redefinition of the concept of "American-ness" itself. However, although anti-Semitism, say, was certainly extant in the post-war years (Kazan's *Gentleman's Agreement* [1947] is a liberal-minded film which charts its prevalence), overt hostility to such groups as Jews was in decidedly bad taste in the wake of a war conceptualized, precisely because of the country's stance in opposition to anti-Semitism and related evils, as "America's one black-and-white, good-versus-evil war of the twentieth century."¹² Irving Howe describes the resultant "de-Semitization" in the popular arts:

In 1944 Ben Hecht noticed "the almost complete disappearance of the Jew from American fiction, stage, and movies." Eight years later Henry Popkin put together a bundle of evidence showing that in the popular arts "the Jew" had become "the little man who isn't there When Hitler forced Americans to take anti-Semitism seriously, it was apparently felt that the most eloquent reply that could be made was a dead silence."¹³

The city's negative connotations, though originating in a sense of dispossession linked to its increasingly "foreign" character, were, by the time of *film noir* and in the context of an anti-fascist war, simply a *given*, a convention of the fast-consolidating genre in the late wartime and post-war years. The "otherness" of the city was tacitly present in the point of view which the genre took up, as was the sense of dispossession to be found, similarly, in the psychology of its central protagonist. However, the genre's main "heavies" (its main representatives, that is, of an alien and threatening world) are not so much foreigners per se as women and criminals. Thus, the genre, in its concern with a crisis in male identity in the transitional period from wartime to peace, makes use of the traditional antipathy toward the city and the "otherness" associated with the urban milieu for its own ends.

THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

FILM NOIR, THEN, is allied to a tradi-

tion whereby the city is seen as a strange and alien place, though the relationship of *film noir*'s protagonist to the city is complex, and the city's "otherness" is perceived more in terms of its female and criminal inhabitants than its immigrants (many of whom, by the time of *film noir*, had in any case become largely assimilated). But this need not be understood merely as a displacement of hostility from foreigners onto women and the underworld. There are additional more important factors in play which make the "otherness" of women, say, within the genre an issue in its own right. Undoubtedly, as the standard explanation of *film noir*'s hostility to women suggests, "the temporary but wide-spread introduction of women into the American labour force during World War II,"¹⁴ taking over from departing GIs, produced a sense of dispossession when these soldiers returned. But to relate the disaffection of returning GIs to a desire, as has been argued, to recover the world as they had known it provides only part of the explanation of *film noir*'s antagonism to women. This approach makes use of one sense of "otherness" (women seen as subordinate in order to protect male privilege) at the expense of another (women seen as alien in order to deny aspects of the self). What I would like to maintain is that an exclusive emphasis on shifts in female roles as a result of the war and its aftermath obscures equally significant shifts in *male* roles during the same period of time. Seeing women's "otherness" at least partly in terms of projection is a useful strategy in pinpointing *film noir*'s obsession with the male psyche, which defines its point of view.¹⁵

A film like *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), though obviously not a *film noir*, may be of interest here. It directly confronts the problems of the returning GIs, making clear the incompatibility of their pre-war and wartime roles and the impossibility of a simple return to the former. Consider the following exchange between Al/Frederic March and his wife Millie/Myrna Loy, after Al has been offered a job at the bank where he used to work:

Al: Last year it was "kill Japs" and this year it's "make money."

Millie: We're all right for the time being.

Al: Why do they have to bother me about problems like that the first day I get home? Why can't they give a fellow time to get used to his own family? Why don't you come over here and sit down?

Millie: The chair's liable to break.

Al: We can't be worrying about

chairs. Not when they want me back in a nice fat job in a nice fat bank.

Millie: You don't seem very happy about it.

Al: I'm not.

Millie: You're crazy.

Al: No, I'm too sane for my own good.

Al's explanation of his discontent is not very convincing, especially in the light of an earlier scene when, somewhat drunk the night before, he'd fantasized his marriage away:

Al: You know, you're a bewitching little creature. In a way you remind me of my wife.

Millie: But you never told me you're married.

Al: Oh, yeah, I got a little woman, two kiddies, back there in the States.

Millie: But let's not think of them now.

Al: No, you're so right. This night belongs only to us.

What this film makes clear is not the desire of its GI characters to return to normal, but precisely their *reluctance* to do so. The explicitness of the subject matter (albeit at odds with the film's surface resolutions) makes this example a useful one; I would claim that such issues are more implicit in, but nonetheless absolutely central to, *film noir*. In the post-war period in particular, the return to normality may well have produced ambivalent feelings in men and women alike, giving rise to both *noir* and melodramatic explorations of such themes, from male and female perspectives respectively. Women are not the only ones whom family life and gender norms may constrain, of course, and many cinematic examples can be given of the oppressiveness to men of family and small-town life (the small town, as I've argued above, being the locus of "normality" in the years following mass immigration to the cities).¹⁶ I have mentioned earlier that throughout the history of the American cinema, two incompatible models of maleness co-exist, of which the soldier and the family man are respective variants. Insofar as *film noir* takes up a male point of view at a time when so many men were expected to take on and discard these roles in turn, it is reasonable to expect the genre's concerns to reflect this in a concentration upon the crisis in male identity which the war arguably produced and which the genre's style and structure befit. There is not, certainly, an exact symmetry between male and female oppression (whereby *film noir* deals with the former precisely as melo-

drama, say, confronts the latter). For "normality" privileges the male. But I would argue that it is by virtue of this fact that such oppression tends to be hidden, and men's desires to escape the constraints of a status quo which nonetheless privileges them tend to be denied, the process of projection providing an element in this denial.

The male protagonist of *film noir* is thus divided to varying degrees. Criminals and women of a certain type, by their aggressiveness and (extra-marital) sexuality respectively, represent anti-social (or at least "anti-normal") aspects of the protagonist himself. Yet at the same time, as I pointed out above, the very "normality" which oppresses the male also privileges him and is not to be discarded lightly nor rebelled against too openly. Whereas women and criminals may stand in for the protagonist's rebellion, it is quite a common strategy within *film noir* for a figure representative of the law (a district attorney, a policeman, an investigator) to stand for the protagonist's desire to punish such transgression (e.g. *Woman in the Window*, *Double Indemnity*). The use of such a figure is generally fairly straightforward, as is the use of criminals as alter-egos, though the various ways in which they symbolically cohabit the protagonist's psyche may be more or less interesting and explicit. But the use of women is more complex, for they may represent not only the projected dangers of rejecting "normality" but the oppressiveness of embracing it as well. Generally the two functions are assigned to separate women, but more than one *femme fatale* turns out to be a would-be wife.

In summary, then, the divided protagonist of *film noir* projects deviant aspects of himself onto the genre's main representatives of "otherness," yet is caught between such deviance and his privileged status (embodied in his point of view which defines the *film noir* world). This reflects the historical reality of the returning GI, so recently licensed to kill, who must now resume the incompatible role of the "normal" family man.¹⁷ Women function within *film noir* as agents both of that prescriptive normality and of its transgression, oppressive in the former role and dangerous in the latter. I have argued that the films are not predominantly about the misrecognition of women as *subordinate* (a misrecognition which guarantees male privilege), but, rather, about that of women as *alien* (thus masking a crisis in *male* identity projected onto women). The films, in other words, are

fundamentally about men with women used as decoys in a strategy of denial.

RECURRING PATTERNS

I WOULD LIKE to offer some examples from amongst many that could be cited, before presenting my conclusions in a more tightly structured form. Space does not permit me to do more than indicate in a fairly sketchy manner a few suggestive patterns which seem to me to emerge from a number of films. Most striking, given the fact that critical attention has tended to focus on the centrality to the genre of the *femme fatale*, is the prominence of the "marrying woman" who sets her sights on the hero, to his obvious but unavowed discomfiture, an unease of which such a woman is fully aware, even if the hero is not. Thus, Coral/Lizabeth Scott in *Dead Reckoning* (1947) warns Rip/Humphrey Bogart, "Careful what you say to me, I'm the marrying type," though she is also the film's *femme fatale*, making her more complex than the following purer examples of the type:

The Dark Corner (1946)

Kathleen: What is it, Brad?

Brad: I got a feeling something's closing in on me. I don't know what it is.

Kathleen: That's me . . .

Brad: I wouldn't be so jumpy just about you.

Kathleen: Oh, yes, you would, 'cause I'm playing for keeps, remember?

D.O.A. (1949)

Paula: Frank, you'll take me with you, won't you? You will, won't you? Or am I crowding you?

Frank: What do you mean, crowding me?

Paula: Maybe you do need this week away alone. Maybe we both do. I know what's going on inside of you, Frank. You're just like any other man, only a little more so. You have a feeling of being trapped, hemmed in, and you don't know whether or not you like it.

The dialogue from *The Dark Corner* is particularly interesting in that it echoes a statement which Brad/Mark Stevens makes elsewhere in the film: "I feel all dead inside. I'm backed up in a dark corner and I don't know who's hitting me." He's referring to his uneasy feeling of being framed, but the verbal parallels with the previously quoted dialogue where Kathleen/Lucille Ball explicitly links his anxiety to *her* are fairly pointed. In some sense, then, the film's

focus on crime serves to mask or stand in for his unacknowledged anxieties about marriage (significantly, the crime for which he's being framed, here and typically, is the avenging by a husband of his wife's infidelity). The same pattern is present in *Nightmare* (1956), though in this instance the main protagonist actually does kill the lover of the errant wife, although admittedly in self-defense and under hypnosis (a case of the narrative protesting his innocence a bit too much, perhaps).

A different but related pattern emerges, however, in those films where the central protagonist helps a "bad wife" to murder her husband (e.g. *Double Indemnity* [1944], *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946]), rather than his standing in for the husband in his revenge upon her. Here the sense of surrender to the woman and the crime and of the inevitably doomed conclusion suggests that the hero is somehow acquiescing in his own destruction as well, the killing of the husband in order to take his place suggesting or predicting his own eventual demise through his association with the same woman. The relation between such bad wives and the good would-be wives who aim to domesticate the hero is no merely dichotomous one, the hero appearing in both contexts as an oddly passive potential victim to whom unforeseen things continually happen as though by chance or fate, or in any event as though beyond his control.

The marrying women seem to know the score, whereas the men they want to marry seem both to resist marriage and to deny that they are doing so, unable to resolve their ambivalence until the dangerous alternatives to a conventional marriage have proved to be dead ends. This happens literally in *D.O.A.*, Frank Bigelow/Edmond O'Brien incurably poisoned and doomed to death before he can — "safely" — feel sentimental about marriage and family (it is after his condition is confirmed at the hospital — "I don't think you fully understand, Bigelow. You've been murdered" — that a lingering shot is provided of his looking at a little girl, and then at a young romantic couple). Frank's included in the shot. Marriage and family can be idealized only when they are doomed (*The Big Heat* [1953]) or out of reach.

This pattern finds its rawest and crudest realization in the novels of Mickey Spillane. Thus, in *I, the Jury*, private detective Mike Hammer's descriptions of Charlotte as a potential wife impossibly idealize her both in domestic terms (fixing his favourite meals, taking

a friend's baby for a walk in the park) and as a beautiful blonde. She is so apparently perfect that, when Hammer returns to her side after making love to another woman (who tells him, "Oh, but you don't have to marry me. I don't want that. It takes all the fun out of it."¹⁸), and asks Charlotte, "You been here all the time?", she replies, "Yep. Just like a good little wife, I sit home while my husband is out with other women."¹⁹ What is striking is both the excess of the fantasy and the inappropriateness of his marriage plans (she is a psychiatrist who will give up her job to be a stereotypical wife when they marry). That she turns out to be the killer of the war buddy who saved his life, and whom he has vowed to avenge, is a foregone conclusion, though his reaction to this knowledge is surprisingly overt in the relief it expresses: "Happy, happy. How could I be so happy? I had the WHY, but how could I be so happy? It wasn't right."²⁰ In *Vengeance Is Mine*, Spillane goes even further in rendering impossible (for Hammer) the relationship with the beloved (here idealized — her name is Juno — in metaphors of divinity). She is not merely the killer, but turns out to be a man, Hammer thereby saved from marriage on two counts, in a classic instance of overdetermination. Thus, Hammer's resistance to marriage is denied by Spillane, external contingencies replacing internal doubt. In general, as with the examples from Spillane, in those films where the hero triumphs in the end, the regaining of control is linked to a repressive denial of his own "deviance" and an often nasty rejection of the other characters — often women — held responsible for his fate. The Dick Powell character in *Pitfall* (1948) provides a particularly unpleasant example, though here the transgressive woman is seen to have tempted him away from an already existing marriage, rather than preserving his bachelorhood through her own deviance, as in Spillane.

The hero's dividedness and his lack of self-knowledge are staples of the genre, played upon in the swing between the presentation of the protagonist as a controlling presence, on the one hand, and his doomed or even explicitly acquiescent surrender to narrative and meta-narrative loss of control, on the other, a loss ferociously denied through violent self-assertion in Spillane, but taken on and experienced with equal vehemence elsewhere. In each case, what is being denied is the hero's personal responsibility for his deviant desires. Thus, in *D.O.A.* (a remarkable clear example of

the pattern in question), virtually the first words of the film are Frank's "I'd like to see the man in charge" (at the police station), echoing the "I'd like to see someone in charge here" which leads into his meeting with Halliday (his own murderer) in the flashback. That a murderer and a policeman are "in charge," whereas Frank clearly is not, starkly encapsulates the film's suggestion of his own wished-for abnegation of responsibility both in the expression and suppression of his deviant desires. Paula/Pamela Britton refers to him as *Sinbad* on the telephone, and the pun — even if unintended by the character and the film — is readable as such nonetheless: "Well, Sinbad, I'd just about given you up for lost. What's going on, Frank? You don't even sound like yourself." Significantly, it is while Frank was trying to pick up another woman in a bar that the poisoned drink (which he denies is his even as he drinks it) has been substituted for his own.

In some cases, the protagonist's surrender to powerlessness — or even self-destruction — rather than his being shown to acknowledge and take responsibility for such "abnormal" aspects of the self, may be linked to the hero's closeness to another man. Rip, in *Dead Reckoning*, can say of his war buddy, "I loved him more," but the avowal is more typically unspoken. *Out of the Past* (1947) is, perhaps, the best example of a hero deliberately turning his back on the prospect of uncomplicated domesticity even though he knows the alternative to be doomed. This film is in some ways atypical in that the hero, Jeff/Robert Mitchum, seems to have a degree of knowledge more generally lacking. He acquiesces in his betrayal by Kathie/Jane Greer, submitting to it almost willingly and certainly knowingly. One way of making sense of this is by seeing as the film's key relationship not that between Kathie and Jeff but that between Jeff and Whit/Kirk Douglas. Jeff acquiesces in Kathie's betrayal of him, that is, as an unconsciously willed and self-inflicted punishment for his own betrayal of Whit, who had said Jeff was both honest and smart (that is to say, he had trusted him). Jeff's reinvolvement with Whit can be seen as a kind of restitution. So Jeff's knowledge of Kathie's character masks a deeper lack of self-knowledge, perhaps, linked to his relationship to Whit.

Fritz Lang, with his usual clarity, makes the dark sides of his protagonists overt. Thus, in *Man Hunt* (1941), when Thorndike/Walter Pidgeon is trapped in a cave by the Nazi Quive-Smith/George Sanders, the latter accuses him



Man Hunt: Joan Bennett, Walter Pidgeon.

of self-deception:

Quive-Smith: You've refused to face your secret self, Thorndike. From the moment you crossed the frontier you became an unconscious assassin. I'm going to show you to yourself as you really are, Thorndike. I'm going to break through that civilized English mask you were born with. I'm going to show you what you really are and were, an assassin.

At this point, he shows Thorndike a hat and brooch belonging to a young girl, Jerry/Joan Bennett, who had helped Thorndike and is now dead. Though the issue in question is whether or not Thorndike had really intended to kill Hitler, the unspoken implication is that he is Jerry's assassin, having used her and endangered her for his own safety. Although Lang insists on the darker side of his protagonists' minds, however, he is equally aware of the ways in which they internalize the law and its dictates as well. Thus, in *Scarlet Street*, a reporter, pointing to his heart, states of a guilty man who escapes punishment:

Reporter: The problem's just moved in here, where it can never get out — right

here, in solitary. So what? So you go right on punishing yourself. You can't get away with it. Never. I'd rather have the judge give me the works than have to do it to myself.

In other films, like Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, punishment is more usually externalized into a friendly but upright father-figure, here Keyes/Edward G. Robinson, though there is a suggestive pun, perhaps, in Walter Neff's "I always carry my own keys," in reply to the maid who tells him the Dietrichson liquor cabinet is locked when she has him wait in the living room. Such puns and metaphors seem to be sprinkled throughout the dialogue and visual imagery of *film noir* — playing with the medium — almost as symptoms or traces of the aspects of the hero which he is unable consciously to acknowledge (in *D.O.A.*, as Bigelow is taken away, presumably to be killed, his would-be killer taunts, "Just Bigelow and me and baby makes three," "baby" being the gun which threatens Bigelow's life). In this respect, Chandler is of great interest. His private eye, Philip Marlowe, is a man of integrity who resists the temptations of the *femme fatale* and thus seems

less divided and interestingly typical of the genre in this respect than has usually been claimed. Nonetheless, certain recurrences in Chandler's work, such as the omnipresence of verbal play, as well as the sense of the law as corrupt and the way Marlowe's loss of control is often linked to a dive into unconsciousness, are worth further study and, I suspect, might undermine Chandler's apparently clear-cut protagonist.²¹

The unease with which the male protagonist of *film noir* confronts the expectation that he occupy his allotted place within society is much more overt when such a protagonist is the villain of the piece. Thus, Robert Mannette/Gene Kelly in *Christmas Holiday* (1944), describing his highly respectable pedigree to Abigail/Deanna Durbin, tells her:

Oh, it does something to you from the time you're able to see pretty near, you get standards set for you and ideals and ambitions that, well, you know you're just not up to them. I do what I can but I don't seem to be able to, well, it's just that so much is expected of you because you're a Mannette.

The desire (seen as predominantly male)

to step aside, to deviate, from one's ideologically ordained position and path is a recurring theme of *film noir*, though not exclusive to it,²² but, because of the privileges of that position, such desires, when not ascribed to the villain in order to be condemned, are often either barely acknowledged or interlaced with doubt. Various strategies, including those indicated in my examples, address themselves to such waverings and hesitations, but the indecisiveness is never fully resolved, at least not in the context of *film noir* when such issues, as I've argued, were particularly alive.

CONCLUSION

I WOULD NOW LIKE to present more formally the main points of my argument. It seems to me that the following characteristics, taken together, mark off for consideration a substantial number of *films noirs*:

1. A central male protagonist whose point of view is privileged through such devices as first-person narration (presented either as diegetic — often in confessional form to a figure of authority such as a policeman or priest — or as extra-diegetic) and subjective framing devices like flash-backs or dreams.
2. An undermining of this point of view (a) through labyrinthine plots which seem to elude the protagonist's attempts to give them coherence through his narration, and (b) through breaks in the protagonist's consciousness (he's knocked out, drugged, hypnotized, or develops amnesia, say), and thus in his control both over the narrative and within it. This loss of control may to an extent be seen as unconsciously willed (or succumbed to) by the protagonist.
3. A protagonist who is divided, but often lacks self-knowledge, this lack projected onto an enigmatic woman or the intricacies of the plot. Thus, lack of self-knowledge is externalized into lack of knowledge of the world. The *film noir* protagonist may be divided in one of several ways:
 - (a) Between a somewhat idealized "there and then" (most typically represented by the war) and the "here and now" of the film's present-tense frame.
 - (b) Between privilege (which constricts) and deviance (which puts one on the wrong side both of the law and of the marriage bed).
 - (c) Between loyalty to buddies and attraction to dames. This con-

flict is overt if it is the buddy's dame to whom the protagonist is attracted, though the buddy — especially if a war buddy — is typically dead. The close male friend may, in some cases, be a figure representative of the law and thus opposed to the protagonist's attraction to a criminal woman. In other cases, the hero's leaning toward him may have an implicit homoerotic charge.

- (d) Between *femmes fatales* and domesticating women, both types presented as threats. The *film noir* hero is usually unmarried — where he's married (as in *Woman in the Window* or *Scarlet Street*), the genre veers toward male-centred melodrama — but he is often of an age where the possibilities of marriage and family seem about to pass him by (think of Bogart). The chance of marriage seems to be now or never, such a protagonist teetering on the brink of confirmed bachelorhood. Domestic murders figure prominently in *film noir* plots and may reflect the hero's own anxieties and undermine the distinction between these two female types.

So *film noir* dramatizes points of crisis — often implicit — in the life of its protagonist, such as those between wartime and peace, and bachelorhood and marriage.

4. A mood of pervasive anxiety produced by these conflicts and the struggle to resolve them, both by the protagonist and the film, overdetermination (protesting too much) on either of their parts often signalling particularly sensitive areas of conflict. Various narrative strategies of resolution may include one or more of the following:
 - (a) The protagonist's death.
 - (b) The death of one half of the dichotomous pair (e.g. the buddy or the dame, the *femme fatale* or the domesticating woman).
 - (c) The transformation of the *femme fatale* into the domesticating woman (she was really good all along and can be married, though life won't be dull with such a wife) or vice versa (she was really bad and can be rejected or killed, her guilt letting the hero off the hook).
 - (d) The exorcism of the past (e.g. by avenging the war buddy) or the

living through of the consequences of a temporary lapse into deviance. In both cases, imminent domesticity may beckon just the other side of the film's final frame.

This mood of anxiety, however, is never fully dispersed insofar as the *film noir* protagonist fails to gain conscious awareness of the nature of the conflicts which underlie it. Such narrative anxiety is, further, reflected in the visual style of *film noir* which provides a continuing disturbance to the apparent reintegration of the hero and resolutions of the plot.

CODA: The Man Who Knew Too Much (Hitchcock, 1956)

IT SEEMS TO ME reasonable to expect a broad range of films made in the period during and following World War Two to reflect the concerns and anxieties which the adaptation to war and the subsequent return to normal provoked. I have maintained that *film noir* was especially well suited, in its visual style and narrative devices, to explore such concerns (albeit in a disguised and implicit fashion) from the point of view of the white American male. This point of view is constructed through frequent first-person narration and subjective framing devices such as dreams and flash-backs, but the control over narrative events which such subjectivity seems to imply is undercut by the bewildering complexities of so many *film noir* plots and the protagonist's lapses into unconsciousness which punctuate such films. The striving for control (both over events and over their narration), in other words, is met by loss of control, and this pattern of struggle and surrender reflects the ambivalence of the protagonist (and his "real life" counterparts) toward society and his place within it, a place which both privileges and constricts him.

In *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a thriller made late in the *film noir* period, the protagonist's struggle for control has largely been lost, and this loss of power within his life is matched by his lack of narrative privilege over his wife (on the former point, note the play made of his wife's having a male-sounding name, when Bernard assumes "Jo" to be the name of the son, and the way in which, through her fame, she eclipses her husband in London). *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, as has just been indicated, is not a *film noir*, of



The Man Who Knew Too Much: The Moroccan restaurant.

course, despite *noir* elements within it, but its central male character can be seen as the *film noir* protagonist 10 years or so further along in his life. The mood of anxiety of *film noir*, as its protagonist struggles to nudge out a place for himself in the interstices between deviance and domesticity, has now become a mood of at least partial resignation ("Che sera sera") to the domesticity finally opted for by both husband and wife.

A number of elements within the film support this reading. Consider the two reasons given by Ben McKenna/James Stewart as to why he has taken his family to Morocco (where all the trouble begins).

1. **First explanation** (given on the bus to Marrakesh)

Louis Bernard: What brings you to Marrakesh?

Ben McKenna: Well, you see, we were attending a medical convention in Paris and I thought as much as we were in Europe I'd come down and see Morocco again.

Hank McKenna: Daddy liberated Africa.

Ben McKenna: Well, I was stationed up in Casablanca at an army field hospital during the war.

2. **Second explanation** (given as Ben and his wife Jo are talking about how the various operations of Ben's patients have paid for their trip)

Jo McKenna: What would they say if they heard us?

Ben McKenna: You know, one of the reasons I came to a place like Marrakesh is so we *could* say things like that without everybody hearing us.

Jo McKenna: Well, I'd like to say something where nobody could hear us.

Ben McKenna: This is the safest place.

Jo McKenna: When are we going to have another baby? You're the doctor, you have all the answers.

Ben McKenna: Yeah, but this is the first time I've ever heard the question.

So for the Stewart character Marrakesh, as a place and more symbolically as a state of mind, is associated with the war (and, significantly, with liberation) and opposed to the claustrophobia of Indianapolis society and "normal" family life (e.g. Jo's desire for another child, which Ben doesn't seem to share).

Dr. and Mrs. McKenna are initially presented as cloying stereotypes of the happy all-American couple (their child Hank is particularly unappealing in his self-conscious "cuteness"), but this is soon revealed as a facade and progressively and consistently demolished (one is reminded of the comparable innocents abroad in Hitchcock's *Rich and Strange*). Marital tensions emerge in a number of areas. Jo/Doris Day has had to give up a highly successful career as a singer, and obviously resents it. Thus (in a conversation which literally gives Ben a pain in the neck, as he and Jo turn to answer the Draytons at an adjoining restaurant table):

Mrs. Drayton: When are you coming back to London?

Jo McKenna: Possibly never again — professionally.

Mrs. Drayton: Oh, don't say you're giving up the stage.

Jo McKenna: Well, temporarily.

Ben McKenna: Well, it's just that I'm a doctor, and you know a doctor's wife never has much time.

Jo McKenna: What my husband is trying to say is that Broadway musical shows are not produced in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Ben McKenna: Well, no, I . . .

Jo McKenna: Of course, we *could* live in New York. I hear the doctors aren't starving there, are they?

Ben McKenna: Well, it's not that I have any objection to working in New York. It's just that it'd be kind of hard on my patients to come all the way from Indianapolis for treatment.

Ben does not acknowledge the validity of her resentment, which here erupts so readily, and he attempts to disguise with a weak joke his absence of any real reason to live in Indianapolis rather than New York. He continually challenges her perceptions and behavior (e.g. her earlier — as it turns out, justified — suspicions of Bernard). Thus, after he's insisted she take sedatives before he reveals that Hank has been kidnapped, she replies, "Six months ago you told me I took too many pills." But he continues, "You've been talking a blue streak, you've been walking around in circles," to which her response is a simple, "I haven't."

Most crucial, however, are the parallels built up between the McKennas and the Draytons (the latter couple a distorted and criminal version of the former, the passing of the McKenna child Hank from one couple's custody to the other providing an important link between them). These parallels occur in several places:

1. Bernard mistakes the McKennas for the Draytons.

Ben McKenna: He started to talk to us, and the reason he started to talk to us was 'cause he was on the lookout for a suspicious married couple.

Jo McKenna: There's nothing very suspicious-looking about us, is there?

Ben McKenna: No, because he was wrong. It was a different married couple.

2. When Ben breaks open the door where Mrs. Drayton has Hank in the embassy, she — and the film audience — thinks it's her husband arriving to kill the boy.
3. In both couples, conflicts develop between husband and wife. Thus, whereas Mr. Drayton is willing to kill Hank to save himself, Mrs. Drayton wants to save the boy.

These parallels (and the visual presentation of the Draytons in the restaurant as



ABOVE — **The Man Who Knew Too Much:** Hank between the two 'fathers.' BELOW — The sedation scene.



mirror-images of the McKennas) suggest that Drayton can be read as Ben McKenna's alter ego, with Mrs. Drayton as Jo's. So Drayton's willingness to kill Hank can be seen as a projected version of Ben's resentment not just of his marriage, but of his son. Although Ben consciously strives to save Hank, it is Jo to whom the film accords most success in achieving this end (Ben goes to the wrong Ambrose Chapel, unlike Jo who discovers the correct one; Ben is later knocked out just as he's about to reach Hank). That the love of Jo for her son to an extent excludes Ben is made clear by both of the film's renditions of "Che sera sera." In the earlier one, mother and child dance together, with Ben in an adjoining room. At the embassy, near the end of the movie, Hank hears Jo singing as she begins the third verse of the song:

Jo McKenna:

When I grew up and fell in love,
I asked my sweetheart, what lies
ahead?

Will we have rainbows, day after
day?

Here's what my sweetheart said . . .

A verse or two later, she repeats these lines, and it is precisely after the words, "Here's what my sweetheart said . . ." that she stops and hears Hank's whistled reply. Clearly there are no rainbows with Ben (an earlier verse asking "should I sing songs?" reminds us of her curtailed career), and Hank has usurped his place in her affections.

So the McKennas' marital history can be reconstructed as a series of mutual resentments in the name of love and destiny, a destiny construed ("What will be will be, the future's not ours to see") as outside of both one's control and knowledge. The film's title and the links between McKenna and Drayton centre the narrative on McKenna's predicament, but neither Ben nor Jo is privileged by the narrative to the extent that Ben would be were the film a typical *film noir*. Ben's status has been eroded both within the marriage and, compared to *film noir*, within the narrative structure of the film. Yet the generic connections remain. The man who knew too much, like so many *noir* protagonists, turns out to be the man who knows too little, at least about himself. His resentment of Hank (and the Stewart character's chilling line, "Why do we have to have all these kids?" in *It's A Wonderful Life* [1946] has resonance here) remains hidden and unacknowledged. Just as Pottersville (the nightmare city) is implicit in Bedford Falls in *It's a Wonderful Life*, and just as the

kidnapping of one's child in Marrakesh is an unconsciously willed consequence of married life in Indianapolis in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, so *film noir* and its concerns stalk so many domestic and small-town films of the post-war years. □

FOOTNOTES

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-Told Tales*, vol. 9 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 140.
2. Dates and directors of all films cited are to be found at the end of these notes.
3. "Film noir is a male fantasy, as is most of our art." Janey Place, "Women in film noir" in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Women in film noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 35.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
5. Sylvia Harvey, "Women's place: the absent family of film noir," in E. Ann Kaplan, pp. 25-26.
6. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol. 2 of *The Pelican Freud Library* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 57.
7. Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus The City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 44.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
9. See Edward Al Abramson, *The Immigrant Experience in American Literature* (BAAS Pamphlets in American Studies 10, British Association for American Studies, 1982).
10. Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 10.
11. Edward Al Abramson, p. 14.
12. Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 48.
13. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 567.
14. Sylvia Harvey, p. 25.
15. "Know what we're going to call this? Self-portrait," says Christopher Cross/Edward G. Robinson to Kitty/Joan Bennett as he's about to paint a picture of her in *Scarlet Street*. The remark is motivated by the fact that she has been passing his paintings off as her own, but it is significant nonetheless.
16. Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) is a key film in this regard. Andrew Britton defines the meaning of the James Stewart persona generally as "if you are the perfect, middle-class, heterosexual American male you go mad." Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Tyneside Cinema, 1984), p. 6.
17. "After World War II, sleepless nights and doubts came to young men once taught 'Thou shalt not kill.' . . . But everyone was telling them that they were heroes." Myra MacPherson, p. 50.

18. Mickey Spillane, *I, the Jury* (New York: North American Library, 1975), p. 212.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
21. Chandler himself seems unaware of such possible readings of his work. In his famous essay, "The Simple Art of Murder," he suggests that the protagonist of serious detective fiction "must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world." Raymond Chandler, *Pearls Are a Nuisance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 198.
22. The Henry James story, "The Jolly Corner," for example, is interesting in this regard, as, of course, is Hawthorne's "Wakefield" (quoted at the beginning of this paper).

LIST OF FILMS CITED

The Best Years of Our Lives (Wyler, 1946)
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (Lang, 1956)
The Big Heat (Lang, 1953)
Blue Gardenia (Lang, 1953)
Christmas Holiday (Siodmak, 1944)
The Dark Corner (Hathaway, 1946)
Dead Reckoning (Cromwell, 1947)
D.O.A. (Mate, 1949)
Double Indemnity (Wilder, 1944)
Gentleman's Agreement (Kazan, 1947)
It's A Wonderful Life (Capra, 1946)
Man Hunt (Lang, 1941)
The Man Who Knew Too Much (Hitchcock, 1956)
Nightmare (Shane, 1956)
Out of the Past (Tourneur, 1947)
Pitfall (de Toth, 1948)
The Postman Always Rings Twice (Garrett, 1946)
Rich and Strange (Hitchcock, 1932)
Scarlet Street (Lang, 1945)
While the City Sleeps (Lang, 1956)
Woman in the Window (Lang, 1944)

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Marlowe finds Carmen in the Geiger house.



HAWKS AND FILM NOIR: The Big Sleep

by Michael Walker

THE *BIG SLEEP* IS ONE OF HAWKS' MOST DISCUSSED films, critics returning to it as if to an unsolved mystery, a seemingly inexhaustible source of fascination.¹ And there are, indeed, any number of lines on the movie to pursue: as a Bogart-Bacall film, as a Chandler adaptation, as a classic private eye *film noir*, as a narrative of notorious complexity, as a reflection of contemporary ideological tensions and fears, even as a Hawks movie. The one angle which, to the best of my knowledge, has been ignored is as a film *about* Hollywood. (The film is set in Hollywood, as Marlowe's visit to the library tells us.) However, whilst I shall pull in whatever seems pertinent from other angles, my focus will primarily be on the interaction of auteur (Hawks) and genre (*film noir*). In *Howard Hawks*, Robin Wood's position is that Hawks was not at home with Chandler, or the genre, and that the result is an unsatisfactory movie: "the Chandler-

Hammett atmosphere is too stifling for Hawks to breathe in happily: he lets in what fresh air he can."² My position is that, on the contrary, the dark, seedy underworld of the genre allows Hawks, albeit unwittingly, to address his own unconscious. The film is 'like a dream,' in which elements, motifs, images resonate with hidden meanings and where the 'latent content' needs to be recovered from the 'manifest content' of the diegesis. On this reasoning, we can see that the almost impenetrable complexity and unresolved quality of the plot is only to be expected; we can also see why Bogart/Marlowe had to be in every scene — a feature to which Hawks was particularly committed. (Mast is informative on the different versions of the screenplay, which can be seen as successively deeper excavations into the 'true' meaning of the narrative for Hawks.)

Although the cycle of films retrospectively called *film noir* includes a wide range of movies, the private eye examples — and certain others, e.g. *Somewhere in the Night* (46) and *Dead*

Reckoning (46), which follow their pattern — have a distinctive format. In these films, the hero's investigation takes the form of a quest, in which he is rapidly plunged into an underworld of crime, vice and murder. The characters he encounters are variously untrustworthy, corrupt, perverse, threatening or violent. Amongst them, the erotic woman — morally ambiguous, often a fully-fledged *femme fatale* — is usually the most dangerous. The quest characteristically assumes mythical overtones: a descent into an underworld where, à la Propp, the hero is repeatedly 'tested, interrogated, attacked, etc.,' not so much to prepare him for the receipt of a magical agent or helper (although, read this way, *The Big Sleep* delivers the unlikely figure of Elisha Cook Jr's Harry Jones as its main donor) as to test his wits, perseverance and integrity. As he unravels the often labyrinthine plot, and uncovers the layers of deception, it is as much his incorruptibility as his intelligence which enables him, finally, to emerge safely. Occasionally, as in *Out of the Past* (47), the dangers of the *noir* world — and, above all, the *femme fatale* — may prove too much for him, and he does not survive.

But, to take issue again with Robin Wood — who, in "To Have (written) and Have Not (directed),"³ qualifies *The Big Sleep* as a *film noir* by contrasting it with *Out of the Past* — Tourneur's movie is the exception amongst private eye *film noirs*. Propp's distinction between seeker-heroes and victimized heroes⁴ (I would prefer to re-cast the latter as victim-heroes, a looser term) may be employed to identify two broad categories of *film noir*. In the seeker-hero category would be all those films in which the hero was pursuing an investigation: the above films, plus such examples as *Phantom Lady* (44), with its seeker-heroine, Laura (44), *Deadline at Dawn* (46) and *The Big Heat* (53). In the victim-hero category would be the many more films in which, whether as a result of 'fate' (e.g. *Detour*, 45), villainy (e.g. *Dark Corner*, 45), psychological disturbance (e.g. *A Double Life*, 47) or his own susceptibility to seduction and/or temptation (many examples, from *Double Indemnity*, 44, to *Sweet Smell of Success*, 57), the hero becomes embroiled in the *noir* world, not as an investigator, but as a victim of its power. Seeker-heroes, guided by their sense of mission and protected — in most cases — by their misogyny (shown at its worst in a film like *Calcutta*, 47) almost invariably survive. Victim-heroes, drawn into the *noir* world by their flaws and passions, very often do not. (I am using victim in a structural sense here: clearly many 'victim-heroes' are victims of their own villainy.) Even when they do not die, they frequently end as broken men: *Scarlet Street* (45), *Nightmare Alley* (47), *The File on Thelma Jordan* (48).

Although these are fairly crude categories, they are useful in mapping the field, so that we can also note (1) the films which possess both sorts of hero, e.g. *The Killers* (46), *Crossfire* (47), *Act of Violence* (48) and (2) the films in which the hero plays out both sorts of role, as in the structurally remarkable *D.O.A.* (50), in which the dying hero seeks his poisoner. It is in this last group that *Out of the Past* really belongs: although the hero is a private eye, employed to investigate, he is also, because of his passion for the *femme fatale*, caught in exactly the same sort of *noir* web as the victim-heroes of *The Killers* and *Criss Cross* (48).

Given the vital importance of visual style to *film noir*, one could equally use that as a criterion by which to gauge a film's *noir* qualities. (See "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*" by J.A. Place and L.S. Peterson⁵). But my concern at this point is merely to locate *The Big Sleep* in its appropriate generic sub-group, as a private eye *film noir*. Beginning with *The Maltese Falcon* (41) and including the Chandler adaptations and *Kiss Me Deadly* (55), the private eye *film noirs* are

the core of the seeker-hero category, as may be seen in the way that the pattern associated with them spills over — to a greater or lesser extent — into the other films of the category, e.g. the cop movies *The Big Heat* and *The Big Combo* (55). Equally, it was the return of private eye movies, beginning with *Harper* (66) — together with *Klute* (71), a bizarre omission from Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward's *Film Noir*⁶ — which led critics to speak of the return of *film noir* in the late '60s.

TO SEE HOW THE GENERIC MATERIAL OF Chandler's novel has been processed into a Hawks movie, we should begin with the adaptation. (For details of the twists and turns of the plot, see Mast or especially Luhr. The plot synopsis in Silver and Ward contains a number of irritating little errors, but it is more accurate than many in the book, whose overall standard of accuracy is lamentable.) Mast mentions the main changes from novel to film. One set of changes was the consequence of building up and transforming Vivian's part to suit Bacall and move towards a Bogart-Bacall ending; the other the inevitable consequence of the Breen Office's requirements: no pornographic books (Geiger), no nudity or drugs (Carmen), no explicit gayness (Geiger and Lundgren). I will return to these, but I would like, first, to consider how the film is *restructured* along Hawksian lines. I would see this restructuring — unlike the subtextual elements which I will discuss later — as an example of the conscious structuring to which Hawks subjected all his projects. In this respect, Alan Williams' structural analysis of the narrative of *Only Angels Have Wings* (39)⁷ serves as a useful model, illustrating a key feature of Hawks' films: that they are complexly *patterned* — events and motifs (I would also include images) paralleled and contrasted in a rich texture of correlations.

Now, whilst this patterning is dependent on the work of Hawks' scriptwriters, I would follow Robin Wood's line here (in "To Have (written) and Have Not (directed)") that it is Hawks' orchestration of the different elements and contributions that is paramount. Of course Jules Furthman is important to the links between *Only Angels Have Wings*, *To Have and Have Not* (44) and *Rio Bravo* (59), but it is Hawks who has employed Furthman and sought the links in that form. With *The Big Sleep*, according to Leigh Brackett, she and William Faulkner scripted alternate chapters of the novel and sent them in to Hawks independently. Hawks started filming before there was a final script and, when his method of shooting — "getting an idea for a good scene and letting it play" — led to excess footage, "Furthman was called in for a rewrite to cut the remaining, or unshot, portion into a manageable length."⁸

However improvised this sounds, the evidence on the screen argues for Hawks having a knack of putting it all together in a highly organized way. Mast writes "everything in *The Big Sleep* comes in twos" and then produces a fairly extensive list, but there are some striking echoes he does not mention. For instance, when Marlowe waits outside Brody's apartment block in his car and Vivian drives up and enters the building, connections are being drawn with the events of the previous night, when he waited outside Geiger's in his car and Carmen drove up and entered. (Hawks cues us to seek connections with precisely duplicated images of Marlowe, watching framed in the car's side window.) On each of these occasions, the scenes inside are abruptly terminated by shots, a woman's scream, a corpse left on the floor and the murderer running downstairs.

One consequence of the paralleling is we can see how far

Marlowe has gained control over the *noir* world. When Geiger was shot, it all happened too fast for him — he neither saw the killer nor had the opportunity to give chase. Outside Brody's, for the first time, he is ahead of the action: although playing a hunch, he is anticipating Vivian will arrive. After she has entered he follows her to Brody's room and quickly asserts mastery over Brody's petty blackmailer. He is thus present when Brody is shot and is able to act quickly enough to pursue and catch the murderer.

At this point, Hawks strikingly duplicates a shot. The murderer, Lundgren, makes his getaway on foot; Marlowe follows in his car, overtakes him, and parks ahead, waiting. Hawks then cuts to a track back showing Lundgren's legs, briskly walking along the sidewalk. This shot closely echoes the one of the legs of Geiger's murderer, Taylor, running down the back steps of Geiger's house to make his getaway. Now David Bordwell points out that, on the earlier occasion, the shot is to signify what Marlowe *hears*: "the shot is a compromise between restriction to Marlowe and suppression of the killer's identity" (*Narration in the Fiction Film*). Hawks repeats the device here to the same end — we can see Marlowe listening as he hunches down in the car seat — but this time Marlowe is in a position of control. As Lundgren passes by, he apprehends him.

The link seems interesting but minor, but it is worth looking more closely. (1) Hawks has returned to a silent movie convention is order to visualize what is heard. (2) He only uses the device on these two occasions, which implicitly links Lundgren and Taylor not simply as young men who have committed murder but as characters who are similar, e.g. in their motives for committing murder (both are *crimes passionnels* enacted on behalf of their lovers). (3) It's a pun: they're both 'legging it.' (4) In psychoanalytical/dream terms, the shots are images of male potency.

Psychoanalytically, this looks remarkably like condensation, a crucial feature of Freudian dream theory. The elements move from the presumably conscious (point 1) to the presumably unconscious (point 4), all telescoped into one image. (As I shall argue later, it is the repetition of the image in connection with Lundgren which is of particular significance.)

This illustrates a key point about the duplications in the film: they may be part of a conscious strategy of patterning, but they often lead to a more interesting sub-textual level. Another example — again not mentioned by Mast — is the way in which the deaths of Brody and Mars are paralleled. Not only is each killed as he opens a door, but also in each case bullet(s) rip through the door, the killing is the result of mistaken identity (Lundgren thought Brody had killed Geiger; Mars' men assume he is Marlowe) and Marlowe is partly (Brody) or mainly (Mars) responsible for the death. In Brody's case he is responsible in the sense that he refuses to let Brody answer the door with a gun; in Mars' case he fires bullets to drive Mars out the door to be shot by his own men. (Accounts of the film's production relate how Mars' death in this manner was suggested by the Breen Office, but Hawks knew a good solution when he saw one: he re-used it in *El Dorado*, 66.)

In effect, Marlowe 'sends' the villains to their deaths at the hands of their own kind beyond the door. The door is like a threshold between the space Marlowe controls and a dangerous *noir* world beyond — but it is also a barrier separating Marlowe from the killing; a device to 'pretend' he isn't really responsible. But psychoanalytical analysis would identify this as displacement, i.e. (in dream terms) he is still responsible. This ties in with Christopher Orr's psychoanalytical reading

of Harry Jones' death, which occurs between the deaths of these two blackmailer-villains. Jones, he argues, is Marlowe's castrated double whose death Marlowe secretly desires: hence his inability to intervene when Canino, Mars' hood, poisons Jones. And Jones' death, too, takes place 'the other side of the door.'

Brody's death, however, also arises out of a classic Hawks situation, in which Brody is juxtaposed with Marlowe, the hero, defined by virtue of the juxtaposition as 'not good enough' and promptly killed. This is what happens to Joe in *Only Angels Have Wings*, Johnson in *To Have and Have Not*, Wheeler in *Rio Bravo* and Luke MacDonald in *El Dorado*, and the deaths illustrate Hawks' ruthlessness with those he deems 'not good enough.' (The hero may indeed spell out Hawks' contempt: "He couldn't write any faster than he could duck," says Morgan over Johnson's dead body.) We may object, on moral grounds, to Hawks' attitude, but it is central to his ethos of professionalism.

In other words, the way in which Brody meets his death in the novel was already so characteristic of Hawks that it did not need to be 'restructured.' Mars' death, by contrast, is only in the film. Christopher Orr analyzes this death in some detail, concluding, "Marlowe kills Eddie Mars because he is a rival (i.e. he has something on Vivian)." Now this is remarkably similar to Taylor's (presumed) reason for killing Geiger, who equally 'had something' on Carmen. (Marlowe's deduction, in the film as in the novel, is that Taylor "was sweet on Carmen and he didn't like the kind of games Geiger was playing.") This contamination of Marlowe by the *noir* world is one of the main disturbances set up in the film by the interaction of Hawks and the genre. An obvious question *The Big Sleep* poses is what would be the consequence for a Hawks hero of entering the *film noir* world — a world far removed from the (to Hawks) more conventional manly dangers of racing cars, flying planes, fighting Nazis, etc. The hero is still a Hawks professional doing a dangerous job, and his superior powers steer him without too much trouble through such scenes as the one in Brody's apartment. But the *film noir* world is also dangerous in its 'otherness,' and this raises more complex issues.

In two respects *The Big Sleep* does not fit the archetypal pattern of Hawks' adventure films: the hero has no best friend and he is not a member of a group. Whereas in *To Have and Have Not* the hero's separation from a group (the Free French) was only temporary, here the group, such as it is (the motley crew of blackmailers) has been criminalized. Marlowe is thus obliged, as hero, to preside over its destruction and, however hard the narrative works to try and limit the deaths he himself is directly responsible for, this inversion of a crucial Hawks feature sets up tensions which echo through the film. To take one striking example: when Marlowe enters Brody's apartment and both Vivian and Agnes are hiding in the back, this is a precise echo of the scene in *To Have and Have Not* when Renard enters Morgan's room and Slim and Mme de Bursac are hiding in the back. (In Chandler's novel, Vivian is not in this scene, reinforcing the connection as Hawks'.) One could argue that Hawks was simply inverting a structure: in the earlier film it is the villain who threatens the hero by his unexpected arrival; in the later it is the other way round. But Renard and Marlowe each forces his way into the room intent on similar ends: to pressurize the man inside into admitting his 'illegal' activities, which involve one of the hiding women, whom the intruder considers he has a claim on. For all that the scenes then develop along lines which emphasize parallels between Morgan and Marlowe as the films' heroes (e.g. each scene has a

turning point when Bogart assumes control of the guns), this initial link between Marlowe and the earlier film's would-be destroyer of the heroic group is an indication of the genre/ auteur tensions in *The Big Sleep*.

The other key Hawks omission in the movie is handled rather differently. In Marlowe's relationship with Bernie Ohls, we see a trace of what was perhaps once a close friendship, but it has been set aside in the interests of preserving Chandler's view of Marlowe as a loner. (Even so, Bernie says to Marlowe at one point, "Let's go home," that favourite — and ideologically resonant — Hollywood closing line, usually delivered by the hero to the heroine.) However, there was a close male friendship: that between General Sternwood and Sean Regan which was broken when Regan went missing. Severing Regan from Vivian (in the novel he's her husband) accentuates his friendship with the General, and it is not surprising that, over and above the services for which he is hired, Marlowe becomes preoccupied with what happened to Regan. On the one hand, he is solving the Hawks mystery (what broke up the male friendship?), on the other, as Gill Davies suggests, he is potentially Regan's replacement as the General's surrogate son.⁹ As such, he seeks to do all in his power to satisfy and please the General.

The Hawks male friendship is thus relocated in the past, as a loss — a loss, moreover, which structures the hero's quest. And, crucially, Hawks preserves it as a loss. According to Mast, the ending which, on symmetrical grounds, we would anticipate (Marlowe tying up the loose ends with Vivian and the General in the greenhouse) was one of the first to go. In other words, Marlowe's stepping into Regan's shoes as the General's surrogate son is *not* followed through. This is one of a number of factors which undermine Gill Davies' conclusion about *The Big Sleep*. Having made some quite pertinent remarks about the character-relationships in the movie, she then analyzes the film on a Lévi-Strauss structural model, and concludes: "Wood's dismissal of *The Big Sleep* is a serious omission, and an implicit admission of the failure of his (auteurist) method. Ultimately, as the paradigmatic structure reveals, the film is a deeply conventional celebration of the all-American, heterosexual family life." If this is what the paradigmatic structure reveals, it has come up with one of the most bizarre interpretations of a film I have encountered, spectacularly undermining Davies' comments about the failure of Robin Wood's auteurism. Rarely have the perils of disavowing auteurism been more clearly shown: I can think of no other director in the classical Hollywood cinema who is as indifferent, if not hostile, to the family as Hawks. (I discuss this briefly in my entry on Hawks in *Film Dope* 23¹⁰.) On the contrary, *The Big Sleep* shows Vivian being *rescued* from the family: the General, who will be told about Regan's death, will have to live with his loss; Carmen will be 'sent away.' The ending celebrates the couple.

I am considerably more in sympathy with Annette Kuhn's analysis, which neatly connects the institutional censorship of the Breen Office with the 'Freudian censorship' within the film and proceeds, psychoanalytically, to explore the subtextual implications. She also takes into account critical readings of the film which she also sees as 'symptoms' produced by the text of the film. However, I feel that she herself produces something of a symptomatic reading in that she reaches the point of uncovering what I would see as the film's crucial 'buried meaning' and then shifts to focus on something else. She shies away from what she actually refers to as "the unspeakable." (I refer to her updated analysis in *The Power of the Image*.)

The institutional censorship exercised on the film is indeed

the most convenient starting point to investigate the film's subtext. Returning to the four areas which were directly censored, three present no problem. The pornographic books are dramatically expendable (the books at the back of Geiger's store are still physically there, and we even see a furtive customer, but Geiger's racket is now specified simply as blackmail) and, to suggest illicit goings-on when Carmen visits Geiger's house, she doesn't need to be nude and/or *explicitly* drugged. As William Luhr writes: "Presumably Geiger was taking some sort of pornographic pictures of Carmen, and Carmen was too doped-up either to resist or care. But when Marlowe bursts in on the scene, seconds after the flash for the pictures has gone off, she is fully clothed in an Oriental-looking dressing gown. And yet, those pictures are soon used to blackmail her. Since nudity was clearly forbidden by the Production Code, the exoticism of the gown and Carmen's doped-up state seem used to suggest that unspeakable things have gone on, without giving a very clear idea of what they are. One might say that they make subtextual associations to account for what cannot overtly be shown." We see here a common device of Hollywood films: to indicate subtextually that which they cannot be explicit about. Luhr also refers to the sinister overtones of the Oriental decor in Geiger's house and bookshop: "Geiger is associated with things Oriental, and in this film, things Oriental suggest mysterious, unexplained, and perverse evil. This is not at all surprising, considering the racism inherent in many American films of the period, and especially considering the fact that most of the film was shot when the United States was at war with Japan, when anti-Oriental feeling was particularly strong. Although Hawks could not explicitly show many of the things the story line suggested — nudity, drugs — he could suggest that anything was possible simply by using an exotic Oriental atmosphere. The implicit reasoning is that a man who surrounds himself with Oriental objects is capable of anything."

But, of course, such overtones are also present in the novel where it is explicit that one of the things Geiger was capable of was homosexuality. Chandler does not approve, and the novel is littered with scathing remarks about fags and queens. This leads to the fourth area of censorship, which is much more complexly handled than the other three. Although such direct references to homosexuality would automatically be proscribed under the Production Code, the film leaves in almost all the other details from the novel signifying Geiger and Lundgren's gay relationship: their names (Gwynne and Carol), the suggestion that Lundgren has a key to Geiger's house, Lundgren's treatment of Geiger's body, his killing Brody in mistaken revenge for Geiger's murder, etc. And Hawks' attitude to all this is much more ambivalent than Chandler's sneering contempt.

In *Film Dope* 23, I mentioned the "sometimes sexually ambiguous triangle of hero, best friend and heroine" as evidence of a "latent gayness" in Hawks. I would like now to refine this: the 'Hawks triangle' is a highly distinctive (sexual) triangle in which a third person, usually a woman, more rarely a younger man, comes between two men who are close friends. The triangle occurs in virtually all Hawks' adventure films from *A Girl in Every Port* (28) on, reaching its apotheosis in *Red River* (47), where, explicitly or embryonically, it exists in five or six successive permutations. What is perhaps most remarkable about the triangle is the number of different ways Hawks develops and resolves it: expulsion of the woman and reaffirmation of the male friendship only occurs explicitly in *A Girl in Every Port*. Other solutions include the deaths of all three characters (*Scarface*, 32), the death of the

hero (*Tiger Shark*, 32), the death of the best friend (*Only Angels Have Wings*), all three going off together (*To Have and Have Not*), the heroine serving to reunite the hero and the best friend (*Red River*) and the best friend deserting the hero to settle down with the heroine (*The Big Sky*, 52). It is the evidence of these variations which leads me to speak of Hawks' ambivalence: the sense that sometimes he was committed more to the male friendship, sometimes more to the weaning of the hero from his best friend, as in *Only Angels Have Wings*. (Even so, it should be stressed how difficult the transition from the Kid to Bonnie is for Jeff in this movie. Each time intimacy with Bonnie threatens — and this includes the ending — he rushes off at top speed.)

Although, lacking the figure of the best friend, *The Big Sleep* has no 'Hawks triangle,' a similar ambivalence is at the heart of the movie. On the one hand, Hawks' Marlowe can follow Chandler's and do an imitation of what Chandler calls a 'fairy' on entering Geiger's bookshop (the caricature he no doubt feels appropriate to such an establishment), on the other, he is clearly fascinated with what went on in Geiger's house: what did Geiger get up to? Annette Kuhn characterizes Geiger's house as "the site of obsessive return" and writes, "cut off from the daylight world of the familiar, (it) is the classic 'other scene' — the site exactly of mystery or enigma." I agree. However, describing the house as "a puzzle demanding to be solved," she concludes, "the puzzle is none other than the riddle of the feminine." Here I would see things rather differently.

If, on the surface, *The Big Sleep* poses the question of how a Hawks hero would cope in the *noir* world, in the subtext it answers by characterizing the world as one of fascination, which takes the hero on a complex journey through variations of sexual desire. At first, secure in his heterosexuality ("I collect blondes in bottles, too," he quips to the blonde librarian), Marlowe sends up Geiger's world with his caricature of a gay and then nips across the road for a bit of hanky-panky with an obliging Dorothy Malone. This is pure Hawksian fantasy (in dream terms, wish-fulfilment): that women met casually (a shop-girl, a taxi-driver) would promptly make themselves sexually available for the hero. But these women are *not* in the *noir* world and their 'availability' is more than counterbalanced by the very different characterization of the three major female roles, each of which is, to a greater or lesser extent, threatening. The extent of their threat to Marlowe varies: since he is not attracted to her, he feels safe to patronize Agnes, and he tries to maintain a similar detachment from Carmen, but the trail of male deaths directly or indirectly attributable to them is a measure of their dangerousness as women. And Vivian is a problem for Marlowe: for most of the film their encounters serve to raise repeated doubts as to whether or not he can trust her. This aspect of the film — the threat embodied by the female characters Marlowe meets — has been well analyzed by Annette Kuhn and Christopher Orr. Although I would probably wish to qualify their readings — along the lines that the women lack the deadliness of genuine *femme fatales* — Carmen and Vivian nevertheless do present a problem which Marlowe must find ways to solve. Ultimately, as Annette Kuhn notes, Carmen is expelled from the narrative and Vivian recuperated into the arms of the hero. But there is a major source of disturbance en route to this solution.

From the moment Marlowe forces his way into Geiger's house to find Geiger dead and Carmen dopey (with drugs), he enters another world. And, crucially, he becomes fascinated by it, returning obsessively to the "scene of the crime" (in Annette Kuhn's words). But it is not until Lundgren

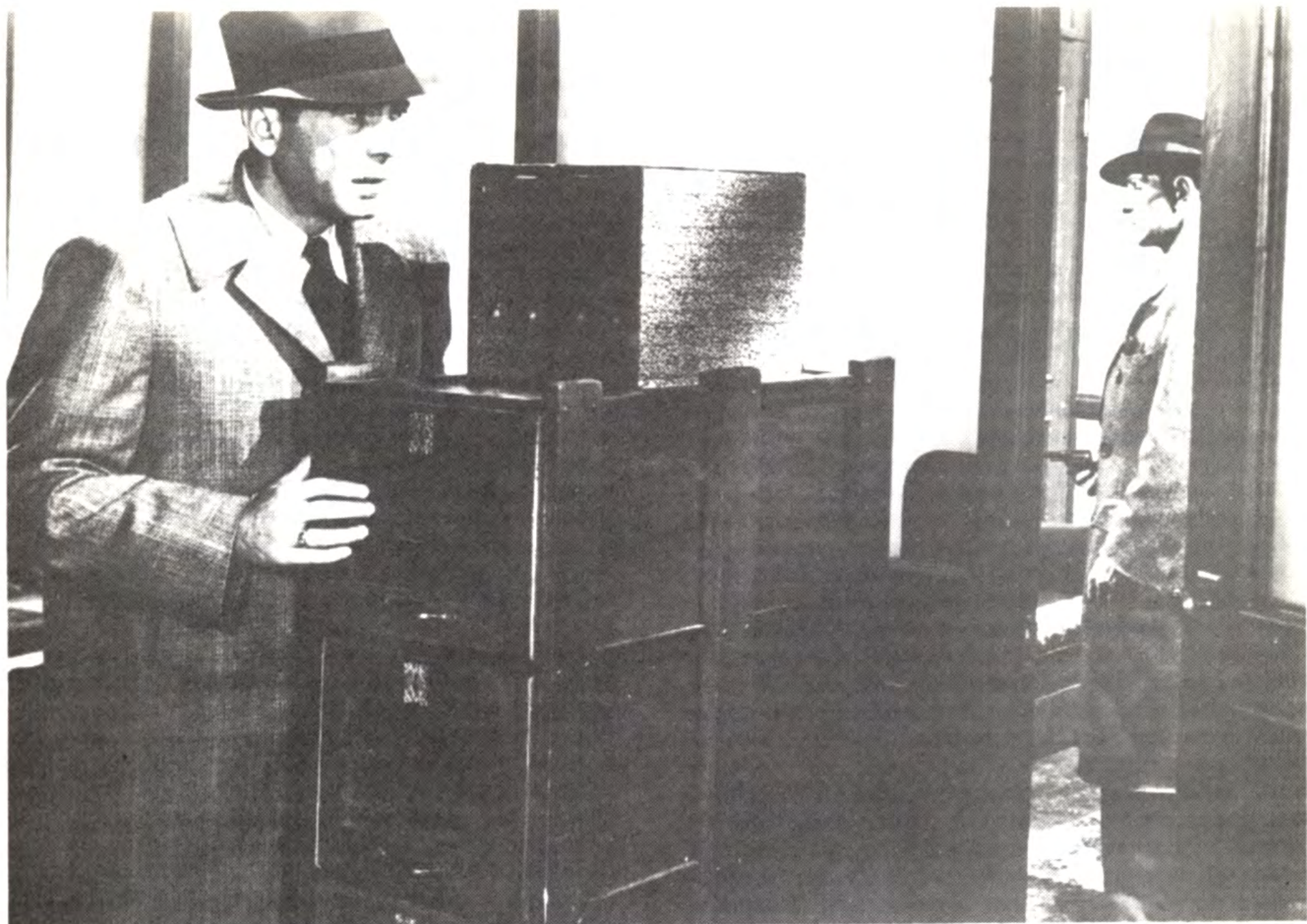
makes his dramatic reappearance by killing Brody that the extent of the fascination becomes apparent. As Lundgren flees on foot and Marlowe pursues by car, we see a subjective shot from Marlowe's p.o.v. inside the car of Lundgren walking along. Now, subjective tracking shots are most unusual in Hawks (indeed, I cannot recall another), which serves to draw attention to what is being visualized here, which is a middle-aged man cruising to pick up a young man, a young man who, within the film's subtext at least, is coded as gay. (Whether the black leather jacket Lundgren is wearing would signal this more directly to a '40s audience, I don't know.) Marlowe has been transformed into a resurrection of Geiger. Earlier, when the eye of Dorothy Malone's bookshop girl travelled over Marlowe as she described Geiger, we took this to be a way of contrasting the men. Now, suddenly, all this has changed — even the shadow of the steering-wheel playing across Marlowe's mouth and upper-lip teasingly hints at a moustache. (Geiger had a "Charlie Chan moustache.")

The rest of the sequence continues the implications. The shot of Lundgren's legs as an 'image of male potency' can now be seen to have a specific resonance. Marlowe stops Lundgren with a request for a match; normally, in Hawks, a sign of male bonding or a prelude to intimacy, e.g. Slim's opening line in *To Have and Have Not*. Police sirens are heard. "What'll it be, kid, me or the cops?" asks Marlowe, pointing a gun. Raising his hands sharply, Lundgren asks, "What do you want?" By way of response, Marlowe pats Lundgren's body, looking for his gun, and fishes it out of his trouser pocket. He orders Lundgren into the car. "Soon as this police car goes by we're going to Geiger's house." It's as if, the pickup completed, police activity makes the area unsafe and so, echoing Geiger and Lundgren's past, they'll go to Geiger's: the "site of obsessive return" recast as the 'site of desire.'

At Geiger's, Marlowe says that Lundgren has the key. (This surely would indicate to a '40s audience that Lundgren was Geiger's lover.) But it is Marlowe who has the key. At this point — significant in that it concerns crossing the threshold into the house with the pickup — ambivalence reasserts itself. Lundgren slugs Marlowe and, in response, Marlowe throws down Carmen's small ivory-handled gun and taunts Lundgren into reaching for it. As he does so, Marlowe kicks him unconscious, then drags him inside and ropes his hands behind his back with braided cord.

Ambivalence can be seen in two details. In offering Lundgren Carmen's gun, Marlowe is mocking his gayness — a woman's gun as a response to a weak (woman's) punch. But the way he ties Lundgren up has clear intimations of bondage; an echo of the practices we may assume Marlowe consciously or unconsciously associates with Geiger and Lundgren. But, with Marlowe's discovery of Geiger's body, laid out religiously on his bed, the gay pickup overtones abruptly cease: the repressed has returned, to reclaim — as if in death — the bed as *his*. (A feature I've not seen mentioned about the decor of Geiger's house is that only a beaded curtain separates the living room from Geiger's bedroom. The bed is thus integrated into an atmosphere of 'Oriental decadence' in an unusually direct way.)

What are we to make of this extraordinary association of the hero with the sexually 'deviant' Geiger? What is at stake, it seems to me, is the very question of the hero's sexual identity. His journey into the *film noir* world has aroused a side of himself — a bisexuality — which had hitherto been repressed in a sexual life-style of casual encounters with women. Allowing for certain differences of time and place, the subtext of *The Big Sleep* strikingly anticipates a major



ABOVE — The death of Harry Jones. BELOW — Marlowe and an 'available' woman (Dorothy Malone as the bookstore assistant).



theme of *Performance* (70). The format and characteristics of the private eye *film noir* are vital to the expression of the theme in *The Big Sleep*: both the complexity of the narrative and the nature of the 'underworld of crime, vice and murder' serving to generate a surplus of meaning which allows room for such a subversive subtext. And, for reasons discussed, it seems to me a theme clearly attributable to Hawks: as if Bogart/Marlowe were his cinematic 'alter ego,' journeying through a dream-terrain marked not simply by dangers and obstacles to be overcome, but also by fantasy and desire.

Missing from this account is the place of Carmen in Geiger's world — the very detail which Annette Kuhn fastens on, at the expense of the gay subtext. It is Carmen's presence in Geiger's house when Marlowe first enters that leads her to decide that the puzzle of the house is "the riddle of the feminine." She argues that this puzzle "takes the condensed and displaced form of the 'sucker list'" which, we note, Marlowe fails to decode. "In the first part of *The Big Sleep*, it is . . . Carmen who functions as a repository of the menacing aspects of female sexuality, with its threat of castration and disruption of patriarchal order." She suggests that, when Marlowe shoots the Buddha's head in the final scene, this stands in for the shooting of Carmen which had been in earlier versions of the script. "Both Carmen and the statue signify the menacing riddle of female sexuality with which neither Marlowe nor the film text, nor indeed the patriarchal order, can deal in any way other than with violence." (The link is intriguing — although I can't see why the Buddha's head should be female.)

Although, as I have argued, the enigma of Geiger's house seems to me to be rather different, Carmen's transgressions (what did *she* get up to in the house?) and her source as blackmail material (four counts, in all) merit further discussion. It should be noted, first, that the blackmail areas are pointedly left unclear. Not only does Marlowe fail to decode the 'sucker list,' but Brody is killed at precisely the point when he seems ready to divulge what Geiger had on the Sternwoods and Mars is killed before the question of 'who killed Regan?' is satisfactorily answered. (Both Carmen and Mars himself apparently had a motive. Christopher Orr discusses this problem, but it seems to me ultimately unresolved.) These evasions are obviously deliberate — the source of blackmail is to remain a mystery. We can nevertheless deduce from this that Carmen's transgressions are, in the film's terms, unspeakable, which would lead us to assume that they concern sexual deviance — along the lines of the nymphomania and pornography of the novel. And, again, Marlowe's attitude to this seems ambivalent: on the one hand, Carmen's refusal/inability to tell him what happened irritates him; on the other, her sexual forwardness disturbs him. Discussing Marlowe's first meeting with Carmen, when she deposits herself in his arms, Orr writes: "Marlowe is distinctly uncomfortable and we read his rejoinder ('You ought to wean her. She's old enough.'). which is delivered not to Carmen but to Sternwood's butler, as a defence mechanism. Phallocentric power, as represented by Marlowe, is under siege."

Marlowe subsequently seeks to cope with Carmen by interrogating her. The scene when the two of them revisit Geiger's together, which could have been highly charged, is largely neutralized by this strategy — and the unexpected arrival of Eddie Mars. And, although the scene that night in Brody's apartment, when Carmen makes a dramatic entrance, gun in hand, is potentially more sexually charged, Vivian's presence inhibits the interaction between Marlowe and Carmen, and provides a means of getting Carmen home.

Nevertheless, Marlowe here keeps Carmen's gun and the blackmail film — symbols of her dangerousness and deviant sexuality. And so, Lundgren's subsequent arrival at the door — like Carmen, gun in hand — is like the return of the repressed dangerousness and deviant sexuality. In each case the dangerousness (indeed murderousness) is directed towards Brody, but the sexuality implicates Marlowe. The movie links Carmen and Lundgren in a number of ways: association with Geiger, age, dark clothes, deviance. And so, it's as if Marlowe's disavowal of Carmen's sexual attractiveness (and, by implication, the attractiveness of her kinkiness) produces the rather more disturbing threat of Lundgren. The rest of the sequence follows through the implications of this.

At the point when Marlowe hands Lundgren over to Bernie Ohls, we may feel that he has returned to a disavowal of his bisexuality. (Indeed, the kick with which he renders Lundgren unconscious, with its unpleasant 'gay bashing' overtones, effectively marks the moment of re-repression. Marlowe's use of the braided cord could equally be read as turning the fantasized practices of Geiger and Lundgren *against* Lundgren.) Certainly the scene which immediately follows, between Vivian and himself in the club, reaffirms heterosexuality in the horse racing dialogue, although we note that, like the taxi-driver who declared herself to be the girl for a 'tail job,' Vivian is interested to know whether Marlowe is a front runner or whether he comes from behind. Marlowe now begins the second part of his quest: to discover what has happened to Regan and what Eddie Mars has on Vivian. And, although this part of the film is less dense and complex than the first part — not least because too many of the colourful characters are dead or locked away — the sense of the narrative as 'like a dream' continues.

A loss in this part of the film arising from a very different set of circumstances is Carmen. Primarily as a consequence of the first set of changes from novel to film — building up Bacall's part to move towards a Bogart-Bacall ending — the narrative now shifts to concentrate on Vivian at Carmen's expense. Nevertheless, Carmen's one appearance in this part — when she turns up in Marlowe's apartment — continues to dramatize her threat to 'phallocentric power.' As Marlowe takes hold of her to throw her out, she bites his hand, thereby giving such a good demonstration of her 'castrating powers' that he ejects her with some violence. In *Faulkner and Film*, Bruce F. Kavin shows that Faulkner's original script for this scene was even more violent: after ejecting Carmen, Marlowe hysterically attacked a chess piece.¹¹ And, although Hawks would not countenance so remarkable a crack-up in his hero, he registers the disturbance Carmen causes to Marlowe clearly enough. Ultimately, Marlowe resolves the disturbance by saying that Carmen must be committed to an institution, i.e. by repressing the threat of her deviant sexuality. Annette Kuhn's reference to the use of violence is entirely appropriate.

In *Running Away From Myself*, Barbara Deming identifies a fairy-tale element to the film adaptations of Chandler: at the end of the films, the hero rescues a young woman from the web which has been cast around her by an evil step-mother (*Murder My Sweet*, 44), an evil employer (*The Brasher Doubloon*, 47) or by her own ambition (*Lady in the Lake*, 46).¹² The imperative to rescue the heroine is arguably the strongest — not least, as a consequence of the Bogart-Bacall casting — in *The Big Sleep*. The web in which Vivian is caught is blackmail: Mars is blackmailing her over Carmen, who allegedly killed Regan. Like a secular equivalent of the witchcraft of fairy-tales, blackmail is the key to the power of the villains. It is blackmail which initiates the first part of the

movie (the \$3,000 worth of promissory notes signed by Carmen, which Geiger has sent to General Sternwood), just as it is blackmail that lies behind the mystery of what Mars has on Vivian. Its potency shows in the fact that, in two cases out of the three in the film's present (Geiger and Mars), it lasts until the blackmailer is dead, and in Brody's case (a) what defeats him is Marlowe's use, in turn, of blackmail (return Carmen's photograph or she'll claim you shot Geiger) and (b) he is also killed only a few minutes later. (Of course, the deaths are also the consequence of Hollywood's tendency to treat blackmail as a capital crime: e.g. Mars' institutionally prescribed death.)

To rescue Vivian from the 'evil web' of Mars, Marlowe must first win her trust. Satisfaction of desire is repeatedly postponed by the nagging "What's Eddie Mars got on you?" At the same time, the film-as-dream reinstates desire by constructing little scenes which dramatize "the imperative to rescue the heroine." Interwoven with the motif of danger 'the other side of the door' is Marlowe's growing control over access through doors. In the first part of the film, this is primarily expressed through his ability to force his way in: at Geiger's, where he takes the keys, so facilitating future access; at Brody's. In the second part, the sense of control is expressed more through Marlowe's (on at least one occasion, uncanny) ability to predict the entrances/exits of the villains. The most striking duplication in this part of the movie is in the links between what happens after Marlowe has left Mars' nightclub (where he goes to probe Mars about Regan) and what happens when he escapes from Art Huck's (where he goes to find Mars' wife Mona, who has allegedly run off with Regan.) In each case, anticipating the exit of one of Mars' hoods, Marlowe gets his gun from his car, hides behind the car and rescues Vivian from the man threatening her with a gun.

The dream-fantasy here is clear: the hero is rescuing the heroine from danger (feigned in the first instance, genuine the second, when Marlowe goes so far as to kill the hood, Canino). Each scene is then followed by a car journey in which the hero and heroine hesitantly (the first) and firmly (the second) move towards acknowledging their love for each other. (And Steiner's love theme — used with such restraint that it is not heard until this first car scene — is played.) The second car scene has been analyzed in exhaustive detail by Raymond Bellour: he discusses the balance and symmetry of the 12 shots of the scene, whilst emphasizing the ideological focus on Vivian, "whose magnified face simultaneously and wholly expresses and receives the admission of love."¹³ But, as noted, this car scene is also echoing the earlier one, and a full discussion of the implications of the *découpage* would need to take account of the links and differences.

In her *Wide Angle* article, "The Limits of Spectacle," Judith Mayne develops an interesting perspective on Marlowe's own entrances and exits by taking the film's opening scenes as a paradigm. Marlowe's visit to the General in his greenhouse is bracketed by encounters with Carmen (on the way in) and Vivian (on the way out). "This beginning of the film might be taken as a matrix, for over and over again in *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe's access to the father's room, the site of patriarchal authority, is diverted by the female" "Woman becomes spectacle in *The Big Sleep* to facilitate the private detective's access to the various re-presentations of the father's greenhouse. This site takes on various guises in the film, from the back room of Geiger's bookstore to Eddie Mars' office in his club."

Viewing the back of Geiger's bookstore (the blackmail/pornography racket) and indeed Geiger's house as re-

presentations of the greenhouse — like psychoanalytical displacements — is an excellent insight. In the greenhouse, the General, who describes himself as "a very dull survival of a very gaudy life" is, like Carmen, metaphorically associated with the orchids: "Their perfume has the rotten sweetness of corruption." In other words, these 'sites of patriarchal authority' are coded as 'decadent, corrupt.' But Mars' office, with its spare, masculine, sporting decor, is different: one might say that it is the respectable front (the equivalent of the Sternwood house, or the front of the bookstore) with Mars' 'true' nature as patriarch displaced onto other sites: Geiger's (in the sense that he is Geiger's landlord) and especially Art Huck's house (more of this later).

The role of the women as ambiguously both diverting and facilitating Marlowe's access to these sites also deserves comment. At Mars' nightclub, Vivian diverts and the nightclub hostess facilitates, and there is a marvellous — and very Hawksian — little play between the two as Vivian, singing "Her tears flowed like wine," appraises the hostess' charms as if on Marlowe's behalf and mockingly signals her congratulations. In general, the facilitating/diverting opposition would seem to be a feature of the two opposed images of women the film has established: the *noir* women (Carmen, Agnes and Vivian) divert Marlowe and generally act as obstacles to his progress from site to site and room to room; the marginalized non-*noir* women (the bookshop girl, the taxi-driver and the hostesses) all help him. Ben Brewster has suggested to me that the working women in the movie, together with Marlowe's reference, in his two phone calls to Ohls, to "red points" (meat and dairy rationing, which was stopped at the end of the war), are a reflection of the film's war-time production. There is, nevertheless, a very strong sense that Hawks was sufficiently uneasy about the *noir* women to compensate for their threats to Marlowe by interspersing his itinerary with *potentially* available pickups. All the 'non-*noir*' women given speaking roles — who would also include the librarian and the girl at the lunch-counter who lights Marlowe's cigarette — show a greater or lesser interest in Marlowe.

Citing Canino's murder of Harry Jones, where Marlowe's entry into the office is barred by a male presence (Canino), Judith Mayne notes that the above pattern is, on occasions, varied. Earlier, with Lundgren outside Geiger's, it is also a man who seeks to 'divert' Marlowe from entering: Lundgren himself throws the first punch. Similarly, when Marlowe arrives at Art Huck's garage (another 'respectable' front) to seek access to the house behind, two men (Canino and Huck) block his way. And, in an inversion of the outcome with Lundgren at Geiger's, here it is Marlowe who is knocked unconscious and tied up. He regains consciousness in the presence of Mona Mars. But it isn't Regan who is with her, it's Vivian.

Symbolically, here, Vivian is being offered in place of Regan. (She even enters the room in response to Marlowe's question to Mona: "Where's Sean Regan?") The significance of this lies in the relationship the film establishes between Marlowe and Regan. In the novel, Marlowe does not know him. Nevertheless, in his essay comparing novel and film ("Who Cares Who Killed Owen Taylor?"), Roger Shatzkin convincingly argues that, in the novel, Regan is like Marlowe's double, his *doppelgänger*.¹⁴ This, I would maintain, is a typical *noir* motif, relating for example to *films noirs* in which the hero is either unwittingly seeking himself (e.g. *Somewhere in the Night*, *The Black Angel* [46], *The Big Clock* [48]) or seeking a close friend whose path he duplicates (e.g. *Dead Reckoning*, *Calcutta*). But, in the movie of *The Big Sleep*,



ABOVE — Marlowe in bondage. BELOW — Marlowe confronts Joe Brody (Vivian and Agnes looking on).



Hawks introduces his own auteurist inflection. He gives Marlowe and Regan a past in which they met on opposite sides of the law, but in such a way that they became like buddies: "We used to swap shots between drinks or drinks between shots — whichever you like." (In *Faulkner and Film*, Kawin mentions that this change from the novel was Hawks', not his scriptwriters'.) And so, when Vivian appears in place of the dead Regan it's as if we are seeing the *trace* of a 'Hawks triangle': echoing, for example, Bonnie in place of the dead Kid in *Only Angels Have Wings*. In *The Big Sleep*, the key point is the transference from Regan to Vivian. Regan was not a close friend, like the Kid, but ambivalently both friend and foe, and this ambivalence is duplicated in the way Marlowe, up to this point, has viewed Vivian. But, in this scene, Vivian finally surrenders her suspect *film noir* persona and becomes a Hawks heroine, helping the hero. At the point at which it becomes clear to Marlowe that Regan is dead, and so the original male friendship of Regan and the General is incapable of restitution, Vivian joins forces with him. The implications for Hawks scholarship are indeed intriguing: in the adventure films, can a woman only be accepted if she in some sense replaces a man?

At the same time, the 'crossing the threshold' trauma at the beginning of the scene points to a specific parallel with Lundgren at Geiger's. The structural equivalent of Geiger's, Art Huck's house contains the "puzzle demanding to be solved" of this part of the film: Regan's disappearance. Mars has ordered the two women to the house to help conceal the fact of Regan's death: psychoanalytically they are like his attempt to 'screen it off' (i.e. psychoanalytically there is a good case for Mars as Regan's murderer). Like 'the repressed,' Regan's dead body lies *behind* the two women in the house. (The film indirectly reinforces this in Marlowe's speculation about his own fate: he asks [of Canino and Huck], "Where are they? Digging a grave?") But, rather than have Marlowe expose this, the scene works to demonstrate his authority as hero. As John Belton points out: "Though physically powerless, he dominates the scene."¹⁵

The two women do not seem to hint at the 'sexual deviance' of the two men at Geiger's; instead their presence in the house is primarily a measure of Mars' power as patriarch. And, on the surface, the scene develops as Marlowe's attack on that power: he enlightens Mona about her husband's gangster-like activities; he gets Vivian to help free him. But, in the subtext, the scene also re-enacts in heterosexual terms the subtextual intimations of the scene with Lundgren at Geiger's. Here it is Marlowe who is 'in bondage' and who, kissed by Vivian, is the object of desire. And Regan's body does *not* return to disturb them.

This 'sexualization' of the hero's quest is one of the most persistent features of *The Big Sleep*, although shared, to a degree, by other seeker-hero *films noirs*, e.g. *Dead Reckoning* (much of which is clearly modelled on Hawks' movie), *Out of the Past*, *The Big Combo*. But *The Big Sleep* differs from these films in the *de*-sexualization of the villain. At the point at which Marlowe first kisses Vivian (in the first car scene), it is indicated symbolically that Mars' hold on her is *not* sexual (her purse does not contain his 28 grand) and this is supported by the way the film invariably shows Mars: detached, isolated, with only his two comic stooges in the background for company. And, if we compare *The Big Sleep* with these other *films noirs*, we can see that Mars' lack of sexual involvement (e.g. his strategic separation from his wife) helps protect him. In the other films, it is the villain's involvement with the *femme fatale* which leads ultimately to his capture (Susan trapping Brown, like a cornered rat, in the searchlight beam

at the end of *The Big Combo*) or death (the *femme fatale* shoots the villain in the other two movies). (Silver and Ward's *Film Noir* gets the fate of two out of three of these villains wrong. This is not untypical of the book's standard of accuracy.)

In *The Big Sleep*, although Vivian is now on his side, it is up to Marlowe to outwit and defeat Mars — and, implicitly, to assume the role of patriarch in place of both Mars and the enfeebled General Sternwood. What is of particular interest is that Marlowe should return to Geiger's for the final confrontation. On the one hand, like other heroes before him, he is returning to the underworld to do battle with the villain. On the other, he is returning to the 'site of desire,' as if he needs to work through his own unresolved complexes and feelings. It would seem that the subtextual interrogation of Marlowe's sexuality is not yet over.

The final scene at Geiger's structurally duplicates the daytime scene in which Mars entered to interrupt Marlowe and Carmen. On this occasion, Vivian replaces Carmen and Marlowe anticipates Mars' arrival. At one level this is a repeat of the scenario of 'rescuing the heroine from danger': Mars is the *real* threat to Vivian, the master-villain who lies behind the earlier threats. (And, again, Marlowe's success depends on his anticipation of the villain's passage through a door.) But, subtextually, more is evidently involved.

The key would seem to lie in the *mise-en-scène* of Mars' death. After Mars has entered, the scene moves rapidly to the point where he is killed; far from the traditional 'detective's explanation' of the narrative's mysteries, the final exchange between Marlowe and Mars serves to throw up more uncertainties. Having exposed the crucial flaw in Mars' story that Carmen killed Regan — why didn't he recognize her when he came into Geiger's before? — Marlowe doesn't probe further, but loses his temper and starts shooting. Mars is thus driven out the door to be shot by his own men.

Now, as Mars is killed, he falls, turning as he does so, to lie in the same way (prone) in exactly the same place as Lundgren when Marlowe had him tied up. Marlowe's matching phone call to Bernie Ohls emphasizes the connection, which could be taken as simply a symmetrical way of concluding the two parts of the quest, a final duplication. But it is more than this: Mars' dead body in place of the ambivalently desired Lundgren is like an exorcism. From now on, Marlowe can concentrate on Vivian.

At the same time, the fact that the film ends with Marlowe and Vivian still in Geiger's suggests that, with Mars dead, Marlowe is now the master of the site. And the disturbing implications of this are not entirely effaced. The first time that police sirens were heard in the film was when Marlowe was alone in his office, waiting for Vivian's phone-call: the call in which she (in effect) stood him up. (She has decided to go alone to see Brody about Carmen's blackmail photograph.) The second time, as already noted, was later that night, when Marlowe 'picked up' Lundgren — as if this was implicitly a consequence of Vivian standing him up. And, in the film's last shot, as Marlowe pulls Vivian towards him, again the sirens are heard. And, although Steiner blends their wail into the film's love theme, they seem, momentarily, to disturb Marlowe, and he and Vivian look away, out into the darkness. It's as if, even at this point, the memory-trace of being with Lundgren in the car is flickering through Marlowe's mind. But he turns back to look at Vivian, and her returning the look reaffirms the sexual charge between them. Hawks fades to black.

This essay has been an attempt to show what it is about *The Big Sleep* that is so fascinating. The discussion is far from

exhaustive: in particular, I have not analyzed the structure of the film's narrative, which can be seen as a series of echoes of the pre-narrative 'traumatic event': the killing of Regan. (The echoes follow a desire-murder-blackmail pattern which is repeated throughout the movie.) Even as a psychoanalytical account of the film, it is clearly incomplete, but, unlike other accounts, it does attempt to relate the psychoanalytical sub-text to Hawks as auteur. Like all great intuitive artists, Hawks in his works reveals more about himself than he could possibly admit. And, in the darkness of the *noir* genre, he found a terrain rich with buried meaning. □

FOOTNOTES

1. The entry on the movie in *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Volume 1: Filmmakers* (ed. Christopher Lyon, Macmillan, 1984) gives a fullish listing to 1981. Since then, Gerald Mast's *Howard Hawks — Storyteller* (Oxford UP, 1982) and William Luhr's *Raymond Chandler and Film* (Frederick Ungar, 1982) have contributed useful chapters on the film, and in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Wisconsin UP, 1985) David Bordwell uses it to illustrate some basic points about narrative in the detective film. I did not encounter the three *Wide Angle* articles — Annette Kuhn: "A Disturbance in the Sphere of Sexuality" (Vol. 4, No. 3); Christopher Orr: "The Trouble with Harry" (Vol. 5, No. 2); Judith Mayne: "The Limits of Spectacle" (Vol. 6, No. 3) — until completing this essay in draft, but I have endeavoured to take account of their insights. In particular, Annette Kuhn's psychoanalytical reading — expanded into a chapter in her book *The Power of the Image* (RKP, 1985) — begins from a similar premise to my own and adopts a similar methodology, but arrives at a rather different conclusion.
2. Robin Wood: *Howard Hawks* (BFI/Secker & Warburg, 1968).
3. Robin Wood: "To Have (written) and Have Not (directed)": *Film Comment*, May 1973. Reprinted in Bill Nichols: *Movies and Methods* (California UP, 1976).
4. V. Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale* (Texas UP, 1968).
5. J.A. Place & L.S. Peterson: "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir": *Film Comment*, Jan. 1974. Reprinted in Nichols: *Movies and Methods*. Since I do not pursue this line in the essay, I should note that *The Big Sleep* does not have the 'expressionist' visual style which Place and Peterson deem to be the most distinctive feature of *film noir*. For all the generic preponderance of night-time scenes, the film's visual style is entirely characteristic of Hawks: "one of dead-pan understatement, never proclaiming its trickiness or brilliance but effortlessly communicating the values of the stories and the characters." (Mast: *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Volume 2: Directors*.) Traditionally described as 'functional,' 'direct,' 'economical,' 'self-effacing,' Hawks' visual style, on close examination, turns out to be extremely subtle, but to do justice to this would require another essay.
6. Alain Silver & Elizabeth Ward (eds.): *Film Noir* (Secker & Warburg, 1979).
7. Alan Williams: "Narrative Patterns in *Only Angels Have Wings*": *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Nov. 1976).
8. Leigh Brackett: "From *The Big Sleep* to *The Long Goodbye*": *Take One*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1974). In *The Power of the Image*, Annette Kuhn gives a slightly more detailed account, but the basic sequence of events remains.
9. Gill Davies: "Teaching about Narrative": *Screen Education* 29 (Winter 1978/79).
10. Michael Walker: "Howard Hawks": *Film Dope* 23 (1981).
11. Bruce F. Kawin: *Faulkner and Film* (Frederick Ungar, 1977).
12. Barbara Deming: *Running Away from Myself* (Grossman, 1969).
13. Raymond Bellour: *Screen*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Winter 1974/5).
14. Roger Shatzin: "Who Cares Who Killed Owen Taylor?" in Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzin: *The Modern American Novel and the Movies* (Frederick Ungar, 1978).
15. John Belton: *The Hollywood Professionals, Volume 3* (Tantivy, 1974).

I am indebted, at various points in this essay, to the ideas of my students at Hounslow Borough College about *The Big Sleep*. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dominic Cahalin, Ben Gove and Louise Kay.

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Duel in the Sun: Pearl (Jennifer Jones) with Lewt (Gregory Peck).

The (Ideo)logical Consequences of Gender on Genre

by Susan Morrison

Nothing, neither in the elements nor in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. Throughout, there is nothing but differences of differences and traces of traces. 'Differance' is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing through which the elements relate one to the other.

JACQUES DERRIDA¹

ONE OF THE SPECIFIC tasks of Genre study as a mode of filmic address is to focus on the intertextuality of films collected under a given generic heading, such films being analyzed in terms of what Derrida has called 'differance.' This type of analysis foregrounds just that systematic interplay of differences and traces — repetition (Neale 1982) or similarities — which is generated by genre conventions. There are certain films, however, which do not belong to the same genre, yet have underlying structures that are so similar that they call out for an analytic comparison. It is the intention of this paper to take two such films, one a *Film Noir* and the other a *Woman's Film*,² and, by emptying them of their generic differences, to reveal their inherent structural similarities. At that point, we shall return to the notion of generic specificity in order to gain some insight into the consequences of gender on genre categories.

On a superficial reading, Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* and King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* appear to have little more in common than their date of execution (1946) and their four-word titles. *Out of the Past* involves a male

protagonist, Jeff Bailey/Robert Mitchum, who is caught up in a web of intrigue from which he cannot extricate himself. His attempts at salvation — by adopting a new name, location and job, and by establishing a relationship with a 'good' woman — fail when his old associates reappear 'out of the past.' They once again implicate Jeff in illegal activity which ends in his (and everyone else's) seemingly inevitable death. The key figure in all this is Kathy, an irresistible woman who amorally manipulates everyone for her own greedy purposes. While Jeff is an innocent who merely reacts to the precarious situations in which he (continually) finds himself, it is Kathy who acts, committing or causing all but one of the murders in the film. Even that one, however, Eels' death, may be traced indirectly to Kathy insofar as the setup is intended to avenge Whit's loss of Kathy to Jeff years earlier.

From this brief plot outline alone we may safely identify *Out of the Past* as falling within a group of films called 'Film Noir,' a category that implies a specific investigative narrative (Gledhill 1978) and shared thematic concerns (e.g. male honour, loneliness, urban corruption). In addition, the film's style, both visual and narrative, also permits similar categorization, with its black-and-white photography, flashbacks, male protagonist's voice-over narration, dramatic chiaroscuro effects, and specific clothing codes, especially the protagonist's trenchcoat and peaked hat.

It is important to note here that none of the above characteristic features of *Film Noir* style is evident in the other film under consideration, *Duel in the Sun*. Vidor's film is not as easy to categorize generically as was Tourneur's. Its protagonist, a young female half-breed, Pearl Chavez, wants to fulfill her dead

father's wish that she become a 'lady,' yet is continually caught up by her inability to control her sexual desires. The conflicting paths are represented by two brothers, Jesse, the 'good' one, and Lewt, the 'bad' one.³ While Jesse rejects Pearl for being too sexual, Lewt rejects her need for commitment, preferring to remain free and unattached. However, his actions betray a possessiveness from which she can't free herself: he doesn't want her, yet he won't let Sam or Jesse have her either. Pearl's only release is through killing Lewt — an action that brings with it Pearl's death as well.

In terms of genre categories, *Duel in the Sun*'s historical context (Texas at the end of the nineteenth century), its iconography (cowboys, horses, guns, Indians, outlaws, etc.), and its panoramic visual style would seem to imply a Western. But the film's narrative structure (the protagonist's quest for happiness), thematic interests (sexuality, marriage, class status, family, female independence) and most of all its female protagonist and feminine point-of-view (not always synonymous⁴) work to overturn the Western conventions. A Western, after all, characteristically focuses on male concerns (law and order, wandering versus settling, the individual versus the group), on male actions (showdowns, shoot-outs, cattle drives, bank robberies, territorial disputes, etc.) and on male protagonists.⁵ In the end, *Duel in the Sun* must be located within a group called the 'Woman's Film'; that is, films whose dramatic structure is melodramatic (specifically the melodrama of passion, to use Michael Walker's terminology), and whose thematic interests are identical to those listed above for *Duel in the Sun*.

Having thus marked out the differen-

ces generically between the two films, let us now return to them to discover those points of contact and repetition made visible by an analysis of the films' underlying structural patterns — narrative, thematic, ideological and psychoanalytic.

Genre aside, the crucial difference between *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* lies in the fact of their protagonists' gender. As was mentioned previously, the *Film Noir* is essentially concerned with a male protagonist, its point-of-view masculine. The Woman's Film is concerned with a female protagonist, its point-of-view a feminine one. What we hope to demonstrate, however, is that both films are very similar in their structural patterns; in fact, one may be seen as the inversion of the other.

Narrative Structure

A CLOSE LOOK AT THE narrative structure of *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* reveals that they are both founded on their protagonist's quest for happiness (the *Film Noir* genre notwithstanding) and that this quest is premised on the absolute necessity of repressing the past in order to effect a new beginning. In *Out of the Past*, Jeff wants to forget his guilt-ridden involvement with Kathy and Whit; in *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl wants to disassociate herself from the taint of her mother's sexual sins and her father's crime. One difference that must be noted here as it pertains to gender specificity is that Jeff's move is relatively active, i.e. self-motivated, whereas Pearl's is passive, imposed on her by her father. At any rate, both attempts are doomed to failure because of the protagonist's comparable inability to contain his/her 'illicit' sexual desires. Neither Jeff nor Pearl is able to escape the intricate entanglement produced by the involvement with his/her 'bad' object of desire,⁶ Kathy and Lewt, although both try to establish alternative relationships with a 'good' object, a more socially acceptable (because sexually restrained) substitute — Ann in *Out of the Past*, and Sam and Jesse in *Duel in the Sun*. These two sets of relationships, Jeff/Kathy/Ann, and Pearl/Lewt/Jesse/(Sam), further resemble each other in the way that the protagonist shifts back and forth from the 'good' object to the 'bad' one; for Jeff, from Kathy to Ann, and for Pearl, from Lewt to Jesse. This shifting is so strong a signifier of the protagonist's (lack of) position that it is possible for the viewer of both films to simply not know, or at least be confused as to which person/position was in fact

taken in the end, by the protagonist. In addition, the protagonist's expression of love for the 'bad object' alternates with the expression of hate for the same person throughout both films.⁷

Narrative closure in *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* is effected in very similar ways. The final conflict is initiated when the 'bad object' has eliminated all but one possible option for the protagonist; that is, to remain forever linked to her/him, physically in *Out of the Past*, romantically in *Duel in the Sun*. In both cases, the protagonist rejects this option, manoeuvring the death of the 'bad object.' He/she is killed at the same time. In *Out of the Past*, Jeff warns the police of his and Kathy's departure by car. When she sees the roadblock, she realizes the set-up, and turns on him, shooting him. She is then shot by the police. In *Duel in the Sun*, it is Pearl who takes it on herself to kill Lewt, and is simultaneously killed by him in the process.

Thematic/Ideological Structures

WHILE *DUEL IN THE SUN* contains none of the themes peculiar to *Film Noir*, it nevertheless shares certain thematic concerns with *Out of the Past*, e.g. sexuality, marriage, class status, love, and what we shall call coded relationships — themes for the most part specific to the Woman's Film. As such themes are inextricably linked to the society for whom they are produced and to whom they are directed, an attempt will be made to treat thematic and ideological structures concurrently.

1. Sexuality In both films, it is sexual desire that motivates the narrative: male desire for a sexually irresistible female in *Out of the Past*; female desire for a sexually irresistible male in *Duel in the Sun*. The protagonist's inability to contain this desire is what creates the conflict that leads to ultimate tragedy. Patriarchal society requires strict limits pertaining to sexuality — especially female sexuality. A sexual female is recuperated into (i.e. neutralized by) bourgeois society through the institutions of marriage and motherhood (Pollock 1977). But a woman who chooses 'phallic' sexuality over marriage runs counter to the prevailing strictures and thus must be condemned, effected in the Hollywood cinema by abandonment (*Mildred Pierce*, *Gone with the Wind*) or, more often, death, as in *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun*. It is just this working out of Conventional Morality that

produces the 'Fated' aspects of the protagonists' deaths. Transgressors must be punished; society won't let them (can't afford to let them) escape the consequences of their actions. What is interesting to note is the similar way in which this is worked out in the two generically different films under consideration. While *Out of the Past* has a male protagonist with a *femme fatale*, *Duel in the Sun* has a female protagonist and an '*homme fatal*.' Kathy and Lewt are merely two sides of the same coin. They are both overtly sexual beings, and have been cinematically photographed in an exceedingly glamorous manner to emphasize their desirability. *Out of the Past* uses Jeff's voice-over narration to heighten our sensual impression of Kathy — "she walked in out of the sunlight/moonlight" — a convention common to *Film Noir*, but rarely if ever used when the subject is female and the object male. While this quasi-poetic type of romanticizing the female body is absent from *Duel in the Sun*, what is substituted is another filmic convention which produces a similar romanticization of the male body/character⁸ — animal association. Most often employed in film to relate women to cats, leopards, panthers (*Cat People*, *Bringing Up Baby*), in *Duel in the Sun* animal association is used to set up an identification between Lewt and his (wild, untamed) horse. It is obvious, of course, that a different discourse is being carried on here from that signified by the cat analogy, a discourse peculiar to the male image in Western culture.

The overt and consequently dangerous sexuality of the *femme/homme fatal(e)* is counterbalanced by the provision of an alternative 'contained' sexuality, represented by Ann in *Out of the Past* and by Jesse in *Duel in the Sun*. Ann is a perfectly normal woman who absolutely idolizes Jeff, accepting him unquestioningly. However, her role in the film is a more neutral one than Jesse's in *Duel*, for she doesn't actually *do* anything other than wait for Jeff. On the other hand, Jesse is a more complex character, for although he represents the 'right' path for Pearl, he is in effect so repressed a personality that he fails to help Pearl when she needs it most. His failure (and inability) to be the hero of the film is one of the details in the narrative that lifts it out of the ordinary. Both Ann and Jesse are cinematically coded to contrast as strongly as possible with their foils, Kathy and Lewt. In both films, the viewer is informed through the characters' appearance, dress, and conduct as to who the 'good' ones are, and who are the 'bad' ones. Kathy's

dark mysterious sophisticated beauty is in opposition to Ann's blonde and innocent prettiness. Lewt's insouciance, passionate attitude, cowboy attire, and darkly handsome appearance is totally unlike his brother's controlled, cautious manner, three-piece suits, and ordinary features.

2. Coded Relationships

a) Good Couple/Bad Couple. Raymond Bellour has hypothesized that the function of the Hollywood cinema is to 'form couples.' Both films provide for this couple formation for the purpose of marriage and continuation of the bourgeois system by creating a 'good' couple to offset the 'bad' one — the good couple being the one that remains alive at the end of the film. In order to reinforce the absolute correctness of the position to be taken towards the transgressors (Kathy and Jeff, Pearl and Lewt), each film makes sure that both members of the good couple are as unproblematic as possible, i.e. normal and socially integrated. Jim and Ann are as alike as are Jesse and Helen in their appearance and behaviour. They seem to be as 'made for each other' as their opposites, Jeff and Kathy, Pearl and Lewt. What makes these films very interesting from an ideological point-of-view is that both present 'bad' couples which are much more fascinating to the viewer than are the 'good' ones. They seem to be saying, somewhat subversively, that what society deems correct and appropriate is really dull and boring. How else can we account for the almost unbearable blandness (let alone bloneness) which characterizes the 'good' couple in both films?

b) Protagonist/Actual Outsider. *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* both establish strong identificatory relationships between their protagonist and a secondary character of the same sex who is also an outsider, although notably one who has no choice in the matter. The Kid in Tourneur's film, and Vashtai in Vidor's, serve as ironic counterparts to Jeff and Pearl, respectively, for their obvious physical 'handicaps' (deaf and mute for the Kid; black and 'dumb' for Vashtai) bear directly on the projected weaknesses of the protagonists. Jeff's symbiotic relationship with the Kid is not an uncommon type in films, especially in Westerns, where the adult male:boy pairing (as in *Shane*) acts as a metonymic device to convey the hero's inability to take his place in society; that is, settle down, get married, have a family. The additional impairments suffered by the Kid — absence of speech and hearing — poignantly recall Jeff's avo-

wal to Kathy in Acapulco that he missed her as he would miss his eyes, i.e. his sight. His blindness is referred to later on when he tells the cab driver, "I know I'm in a frame. Now I'm going to look at the picture." Jeff's refusal to see the consequences of his actions is what put him in that position in the first place. In *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl's relationship to Vashtai is less important to the structure of the narrative — unlike Vashtai, the Kid has specific narrative tasks to perform. Pearl does not herself promote a pairing with Vashtai; yet such a pairing is inevitable on the viewer's part, for, like Vashtai, Pearl is treated as a servant by her cousins. She's relegated to a little hovel and given menial tasks to perform despite the family's wealth. Pearl's half-breed status is never forgotten by the senator, and his frequent racial slurs constantly remind her that she is as inferior to the whites as is Vashtai, a black. Our first introduction to Vashtai is a scene played for humour, where Vashtai asks Laurabelle if she can get married, and then inquires as to whether Laurabelle knows of any potential suitors. This desire for marriage neatly parallels Pearl's similar desire; in contrast, though, Pearl's is fully motivated (although just as confused). Her marriage would be a means of raising her status. However, in the end, Pearl is just as unable to get out of her inferior position as is Vashtai, locked in as they are by an inflexible society.

3. Marriage. An important theme common to *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* is that of marriage, seen here as an ideal position, a highly desirable solution for the protagonists' particular problems. Marriage is the only way in which they can redeem themselves, the only way in which they can be integrated into a society that treats them as outsiders. Both Jeff and Pearl openly express their desire for marriage. Jeff tells Ann of his plans to build a house, marry her, and live happily ever after. Pearl looks to marriage as a path to respectability, to the fulfillment of her father's wishes that she become a lady. She moves from one prospect (Jesse) to another (Lewt), to yet another (Sam), in her desperate search to achieve a sexual stability through marriage. But, ultimately, neither Jeff nor Pearl is successful; they are too marked by the excesses of their pasts. In *Out of the Past*, Ann's family rejects Jeff, citing his mysterious past and anti-social behaviour — he refuses to meet Ann under normal social terms, i.e. by entering her house instead of taking the 'pariah's' position

outside the front gate. To add to this, Kathy won't let Jeff go; she won't allow him to 'normalize.' She manipulates events in such a way that Jeff has no other choice but to stay with her. In *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl's desire for marriage is thwarted repeatedly: to Jesse, by her unrestrained sexual behaviour which he can't forgive; to Lewt, by her inferior racial and social position which the senator won't ignore; to Sam, by Lewt's obsessive possessiveness which causes him to murder the prospective bridegroom. Therefore, for Jeff and for Pearl, marriage is unattainable. What is offered both protagonists, however, is a kind of non-marriage, a sexual union outside the bonds of the law and church. Lewt won't marry Pearl, but wants/expects her to remain true to him, even after he has brutally rejected her offer to follow him to Mexico just to live with him. Kathy wants/expects Jeff to run off with her, to live in Mexico together as outlaws, united in their common 'badness.' But Jeff and Pearl both reject this unsanctified relationship; what they both choose instead is what we might call a marriage-in-death. Jeff will not live with Kathy, refusing to accept the inevitability of their pairing, as it would force him to confront too many issues he has tried to suppress, especially *vis à vis* sexuality. Rather, he prefers to die with her. In *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl finds herself in an uncannily similar situation, the difference being that Lewt wants her yet doesn't want her at the same time. Like Jeff, Pearl 'solves' the problem by joining herself to Lewt in a ritual marriage by/in death.

Psychoanalytic Structure

IT IS NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE of this paper to investigate fully the psychoanalytic structures of *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun*; however, we shall bring together some of the ideas formulated by others (Mulvey 1981, Walsh 1982) in order to indicate the similarities inherent in the two films.

Both films may be said to be 'oedipal dramas,' focusing on the protagonist's position with regards to oedipalization. On the one hand, the protagonist is offered a route to oedipal resolution, a coming-to-terms with phallic sexuality under the Rule of the Law. For Jeff, this is represented by Ann; for Pearl, by Jesse. It is this path that is deemed correct by society. On the other hand, the protagonist is presented with an alternative route, a choice of rejecting oedipalization. Mulvey describes this position as



Out of the Past: Jeff (Robert Mitchum) and Cathy (Jane Greer).

a nostalgia for the pre-oedipal state, characterized by a phallic narcissistic omnipotence. It is by definition an anti-social position, outside the Law. Kathy personifies this option for Jeff; Lewt personifies it for Pearl. It is noteworthy that both Kathy and Lewt are, in fact, outlaws themselves. As has been discussed previously, the protagonist oscillates between the conflicting desires, the 'radically incompatible positions' (Walsh 1982). Indeed, it is the protagonist's resistance to oedipalization that produces the tensions in both films. Not until the end of the two films does the protagonist make a choice, actively determining the outcome. Although Jeff and Pearl both ultimately choose the Law, Jeff by calling the police, Pearl by taking it on herself to avenge Jesse's shooting, neither can live *under* it. In each case, the only possible solution, the only way the narrative can engineer clo-

sure, is by annihilating the protagonist. We might say that in both films, it is the *narrative* that rejects oedipalization by opting for the protagonist's death rather than recuperation into Lawful society.

Conclusion

HAVING THUS MAPPED out the various points of contact and repetition in *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun*, let us now reintroduce the concept of Genre and generic specificity in order to ascertain whether we can indeed arrive at a conclusion to our argument.

What we hoped to demonstrate in this paper was that the two films selected for analysis had remarkably similar structural patterns although they were generically different. As has been pointed out, *Film Noir* is commonly held to be a male-oriented genre, the

Woman's Film a female-oriented one. In spite of that, *Out of the Past* and *Duel in the Sun* appear to be doing the same kind of ideological work. That is, they both mark out the correct path for their protagonist to take *vis à vis* phallic sexuality. What is central to our thesis is the realization that it is the *wrong* choice that is so crucial to and characteristic of both *Film Noir* and the Woman's Film. Indeed, it is precisely that which so strongly saturates the atmosphere of these two generic groups with the same sense of inevitable doom. Where the *Film Noir* presents us with an essentially passive male tempted by an active, sexually aggressive female, the Woman's Film places the passive (but sexual) female at the centre of the narrative, and proceeds to tempt her with an active aggressively sexual male. In other words, the order has been inverted. But *both* male and female protagonists suc-

cumb to the temptation, and are duly punished for their transgressions. □

FOOTNOTES

1. "Semiologie et Grammatologie," by Jacques Derrida, in *Positions*, pp. 37-38, as cited in Paul Willemen's *Notes Towards the Construction of Readings of Tourneur*, pp. 21-22.
2. The decision to use 'Woman's Film' rather than 'Melodrama' was made in this instance as it offers a much more precise definition of the key elements of *Duel in the Sun*. It is of course understood that both genre categories — *Film Noir* and *Melodrama/Woman's Film* — are problematic in that there has been much debate as to exactly what constitutes each as a specific category. *Film Noir* can be as catholic as *Melodrama* in certain definitions. In order to be more exact for the purpose of this paper, the type of *Film Noir* that we are concerned with is that in which the protagonist is tempted to commit illegal actions by a 'femme fatale.' Other films of this type are *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.
3. A further example of the 'confusion of choices' rampant in this film is that, to the Senator and Lewt's friends, it is Lewt who is the 'good' son, and Jesse who is the 'bad' one.
4. *Heller in Pink Tights* is an example of a film which has a female protagonist, but which is told from the male point-of-view. Sophia Loren's character is a fabrication of male clichés about the 'second sex.' Imaged as an object rather than as a person, she gets her way by being manipulative (rather than being manipulated). She makes the right choice vis a vis society, the older man who offers her marriage, thus initiating the requisite 'happy ending.'
5. Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* is another example of a film which superficially appears to be a Western. At first, the major conflict is presented as a territorial dispute between Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge. However, the underlying tensions and hostilities between the two women quickly produce the realization that the real conflict is about sexuality: Mercedes McCambridge's repressed desires inflamed by Joan Crawford's openly free expression of her sexuality. The resulting film is a marvellous playing-out of these contradictions that culminates in a shoot-out between the two women which matches the final gunfight between Pearl and Lewt in *Duel in the Sun* for its passion. Like *Duel in the Sun*, it, too, can be collected under the Genre heading of *Melodrama*.
6. The 'object of desire' is a term used in Lacanian psychoanalysis to specify the subject's focus for libidinal cathexis. Melanie Klein postulated the notion of 'good object/bad object' to describe the splitting into two of the object of desire by the pre-Oedipal subject in order to accommodate his/her ambivalence (love/hate) towards it.
7. Both of these phenomena — shifting from good object to bad object and the love/hate oscillation towards the bad object — are markedly reminiscent of the above-mentioned (footnote 6) ambivalence of the subject to the object of desire.

8. While Gregory Peck is romanticized in the film, he is in no way feminized. He always projects a tough, independent, masculine image.
9. In other words, to continue the psychoanalytic approach, in both films, the film-as-subject maintains a good object/bad object relationship with the ostensibly 'bad' couple. This is made concrete, however, in *Duel in the Sun*, where the film's prologue and epilogue eulogize Pearl's love for Lewt — a love which the body of the film seems to denigrate.

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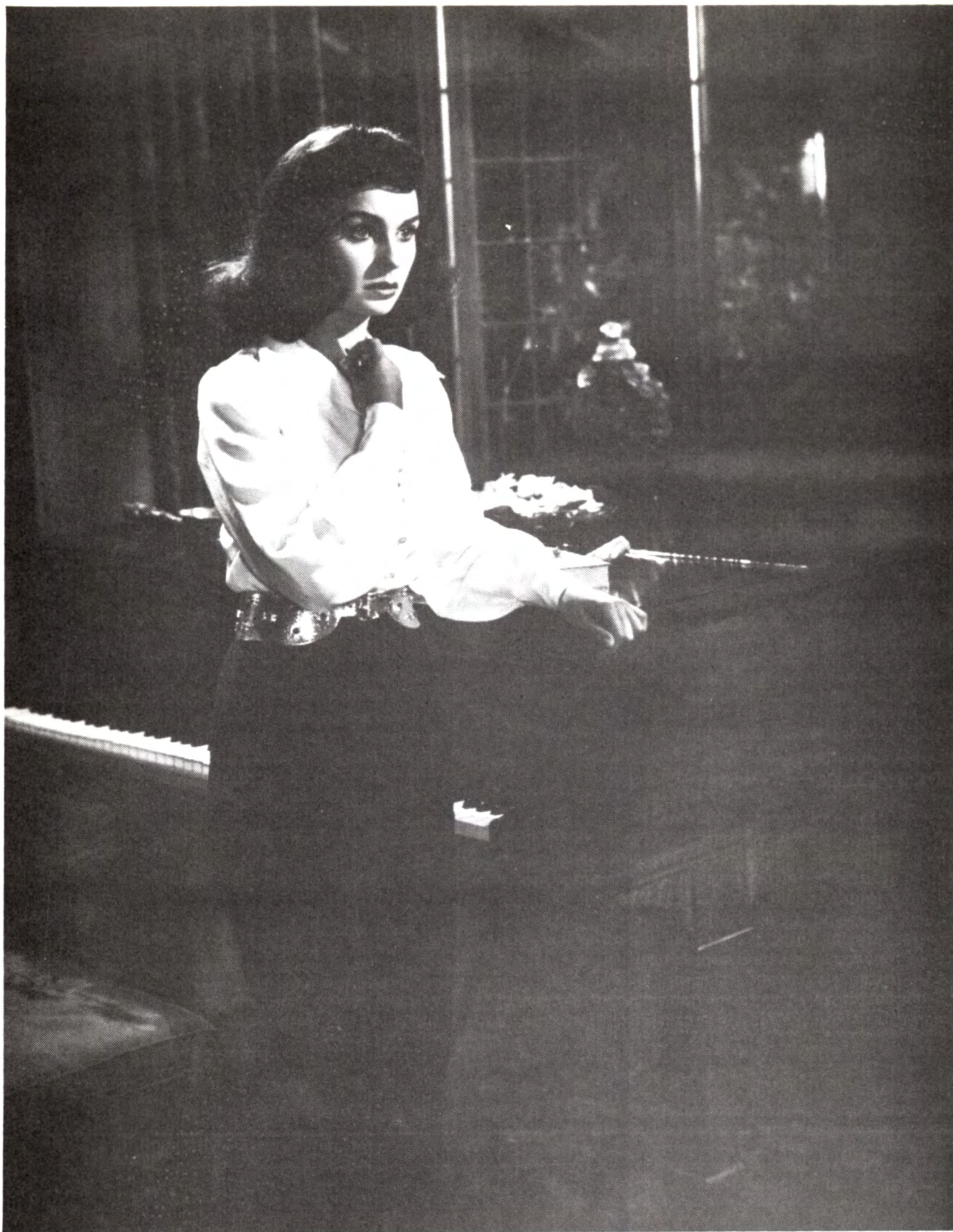
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The introduction of Diane.

At the Margins of Film Noir: PREMINGER'S *ANGEL FACE*

by Richard Lippe

I HAVE GREATLY ADMIRERD *ANGEL FACE* FOR A long time and had often considered writing on the film but when it came to doing so, I realized that I couldn't account for various aspects of it which seemed relevant to its over-all conception. It has been only recently that I have begun to think that I could produce an interpretation of the film that did justice to its complexity. In this paper, I am not attempting to offer a reading of the film that pretends to explain what the film is about in any sort of all-encompassing manner. Aside from my concern with Preminger's critical reputation, my intention is to discuss certain thematic and stylistic aspects of *Angel Face* that I think are of particular importance to my perception of the film.

* * *

OTTO PREMINGER WAS PROCLAIMED AN auteur by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics in the '50s and promoted as such in the early '60s by the original *Movie* critics. By the mid-'60s, the popular press had adopted the notion of the director as auteur/artist although it tended to disregard the underpinnings of the auteur theory. While there was a superficial acceptance of the theory, journalistic critics continued to concentrate on the film's subject — they never grasped the principle that what gives the auteur's film distinction isn't the subject matter itself but how the director regards it. This was particularly evident in their responses to Preminger's films. In the early to mid-'60s Preminger undertook several 'big' subject projects based on best-selling novels and the resulting films were, for the most part, judged largely on the literary status of their source materials. That Preminger's *mise-en-scène* often produced complex attitudes toward his material was ignored; instead, the films were criticized for their commercialism which was taken as an indication of Preminger's vulgar sensibility. On his part, Preminger refused to make apologies and, as a result, the reviews became increasingly hostile. And, eventually, Preminger himself was under attack; like Hitchcock, he had created a somewhat outrageous media persona to promote his films, but whereas the press delighted in Hitchcock's various self-promotional strategies, Preminger was accused of using tactics to gain the public's attention. Gradually, Preminger lost his battle with the critics and lost his public as well. Driven by the press from the blockbuster novel, he took refuge in eccentric treatments of already idiosyncratic subject matter (*Skidoo*, *Tell Me That You Love Me*, *Junie Moon*).

Preminger's critical reputation, at least outside France, has always stood on the superficially more modest (i.e., low budget) black/white films of the '40s and early '50s. As a result of the present backlash, even these have largely fallen into neglect. The rehabilitation of Preminger's obviously more problematic late work has yet to be undertaken and seems to be not so impossible a task as is generally assumed.

Meanwhile I want to examine one of the most remarkable of the earlier films, *Angel Face*, which, in fact, I feel to be no less ambitious, scarcely less eccentric in relation to the norms and no more understood than the late films.

Angel Face (1952) is the last film Preminger made before establishing himself as an independent producer-director; the film also marks the end of his association with the *film noir* which began with *Laura* and includes *Fallen Angel*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *The Thirteenth Letter*. But with the exception of *Laura*, there has been almost nothing written on these films although they are often cited, *Angel Face* in particular, in discussions of the *film noir* cycle. For that matter, critics writing on Preminger, many of whom consider *Angel Face* one of his most provocative and enigmatic films, have been reluctant to deal with it in detail and attempt to define what the film actually does by falling back on what became the clichés of early Preminger criticism: 'objectivity' and 'neutrality.' I want to argue that what has been mistaken for neutrality is in fact an unusually sophisticated complexity of attitude. But before elaborating, I want to consider the early auteurist position on Preminger and the film.

Jacques Rivette, in his article "The Essential,"¹ a typically esoteric and mystifying piece of *Cahiers du Cinéma* criticism, acknowledges that the film relates to a Preminger thematic but evades the implied promise of pursuing this in favour of using the film as a pretext for pursuing the mirage of the cinematic 'essential,' a favourite project of the early auteurist critics but extremely dubious in relation to the impure nature of an art form that derives from other art forms. In Rivette's estimation, *Angel Face* is an "... utterly enigmatic film ..." and, as such, characteristic of Preminger's cinema of which he says, "In the midst of a dramatic space created by human encounters he would instead exploit to its limit the cinema's ability to capture the fortuitous (but a fortuity that is willed), to record the accidental (but the accidental that is created) through the closeness and sharpness of the look; the relationships of the characters create a closed circuit of exchanges, where nothing makes an appeal to the viewer" (p. 134). Rivette's description of Preminger's approach to his subject is highly perceptive but what is perhaps most intriguing is that the observation could have been just as easily made about an early '50s Rossellini film like *Voyage to Italy*. There are, of course, many points at which these two filmmakers don't intersect; what connects Preminger and Rossellini, it seems to me, is that both are employing formal strategies which counter certain rules of the classical cinema. In Rossellini's work, these challenges are direct and radical; Preminger, on the other hand, produces these strategies while remaining within the bounds of classical style, continually pushing against those bounds, emphasizing certain of the devices it makes available while virtually eliminating others. The neglect of Preminger by the semiotic school may be accountable for by that school's preoccupation with the typical and the representative and its tendency to reduce classical cinema to a more or less constant set of narrative patterns and stylistic devices.

Preminger's cinema, in its stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasy, resists reduction to the 'typical.'

In "From *Laura* to *Angel Face*,"² Paul Mayersberg begins by noting that in Preminger's contract films there is a "... preoccupation with the personality of women" Although there are numerous later Preminger films that are centrally concerned with women's identity and experience (e.g., *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Exodus*, *Bunny Lake Is Missing*, etc.),³ Mayersberg primarily restricts himself to the early films because his concern is to illustrate that, while these were studio assignments, they display stylistic and thematic consistency. And it is for this reason that Mayersberg is interested in the films' female characters, whom he reads as the means by which Preminger imposes his thematic concerns on the material. Hence, for Mayersberg, *Angel Face* is Preminger's most fully realized study of the obsessive personality. But, in Mayersberg's schema, it doesn't really matter whether or not the character who embodies the thematic is female or male. Nevertheless, Mayersberg's article is of interest, aside from his tracing of Preminger's thematic concerns, in that it perhaps inadvertently acknowledges the extent to which Preminger's cinema is woman-centred. Aside from Molly Haskell, who, in *From Reverence to Rape*,⁴ includes Preminger along with Ophuls, Sirk and Lubitsch as directors whose achievements are often underrated because the critics don't take the work of a 'woman's director' seriously, there seems to have been no critical investigation of Preminger's work in relation to the melodrama and/or the woman's film. While such films as *Laura*, *Fallen Angel* and *Angel Face* have the necessary characteristics to be identified as belonging to the *noir* genre, these films also are through a combination of subject and treatment, a complex genre mixture. *Fallen Angel*, for instance, has a hero who is positioned between two women who represent, respectively, the active/sexual and the passive/non-sexual. This pattern is found in numerous *noir* films, but in *Fallen Angel*, its relation to the melodrama is explicit.⁵ *Fallen Angel* is, in its triangular relationship which pivots on the hero's choice, a male-centred melodrama in the tradition of a film like *Sunrise* to which it bears comparison. Although both films employ male and female archetypes, in *Fallen Angel* these images are neither aligned with nor reduced to elemental forces within nature. Instead, the identities of the film's central protagonists are shown to be the result of a social system that encourages patterns of domination and/or exploitation between the sexes. In the film, it isn't evil but economic forces that have made Linda Darnell greedy and Dana Andrews desperate. And, although Alice Faye, as the 'good' woman, functions as Andrews' salvation, the film also suggests that her motives include freeing herself from the repressive social and sexual conditions of her small town existence. *Angel Face*, on the other hand, has strong affinities to the woman's film; more specifically, as the film's central female protagonist is obsessed, it belongs to what has become, since the early '40s and the introduction of psychoanalysis into popular culture, a sub-genre of the woman's film. The film links a woman's destructive behaviour to madness, but unlike such films as *The Dark Mirror*, *The Locket* and *Possessed*, *Angel Face* doesn't deal with psychiatry or provide an explicit psychoanalytic explanation to account for its heroine's illness. In this respect and others, i.e., the heroine's strong attachment to her father, the film has parallels to *Leave Her to Heaven*, which is another film, like those mentioned above, that belongs to both the *noir* and the woman's film genres; but, although *Leave Her to Heaven* is of considerable interest in that Stahl's direction and Gene Tierney's persona work to undercut the film's ideological project of making the Tierney character and her demands

monstrous, the film lacks *Angel Face*'s systematic analysis of gender and class relations.

In discussing the way in which Preminger's films work, Mayersberg says that Preminger "... detaches the spectator to a degree and allows him to judge the characters for himself." In part, this claim is based on the fact that Preminger is a *mise-en-scène* filmmaker who tends to avoid using montage to construct 'meaning' for the viewer through cutting to a specific object, gesture, detail, etc. But the claim is also based on the assumption that Preminger himself has an 'objective' attitude toward his material. Mayersberg implies this when, after analyzing a sequence from *Daisy Kenyon* to illustrate Preminger's approach and how it functions, he says: "It is, in effect, part of Preminger's detachment, because as a style it doesn't force an attitude or an emotional experience on the spectator. The spectator, like the camera, arrives at the experience. Then the camera moves on and the experience is modified and enriched: the moments become functions in a total development" (p. 16). As with Rivette, Mayersberg's project is to argue that Preminger's sensibility, which is expressed through his *mise-en-scène*, is highly attuned to the medium and its potential to record, in the Bazinian sense, the more intangible aspects of human behaviour and interaction. For these critics, Preminger's supposed 'detachment' affords him the means to comment on the 'human condition.' But, on the contrary, while Preminger uses *mise-en-scène* to produce a critical distance from his subject, he doesn't exist outside of or transcend the concerns of his films: he is deeply implicated in the films' thematic. Similarly, Preminger's films often contain characters who are ambiguous in their behaviour but the films don't express an impartial attitude to the characters and their situations.

Although cultural politics shaped auteur criticism to a degree, this criticism, which has been invaluable to the development of a critical/theoretical rethinking of the cinema, was, for the most part, as the introduction of the concept of ideology into film criticism has shown, non-political. Despite the various arguments put forth against authorship, it remains, I think, a significant element in critical discipline. To recognize that specific cultural, social and historical factors contribute to the construction of an individual, the work s/he produces and its reception is crucial; but it is also important to recognize that human intelligence and creativity exist.

Angel Face,⁶ unlike Preminger's other contract films, wasn't a Twentieth Century-Fox production; the film was made at RKO which, at the time, was owned by Howard Hughes who requested Preminger's services because he wanted a director who could work quickly under pressure. In his autobiography,⁷ Preminger says that Hughes' primary reason for making the film was to pique Jean Simmons, with whom he was having conflicts. Simmons had 18 working days left to her contract and Hughes was determined to get another film out of her. To obtain his commitment, Hughes agreed to Preminger's demands, which included a new script by writers of his choice and with whom Preminger worked. In effect, Hughes gave Preminger almost total freedom to do as he wanted with the project.

While there seems to be a more or less agreed critical consensus about *film noir* conventions, critical emphasis tends to vary as to what constitutes a *noir* film: iconography, visual style, narrative structure, protagonists, thematic concerns, the historical moment are, among others, variables in how these films are to be read. In narrative structure, *Angel Face*, for instance, doesn't employ such 'typical' *noir* conventions as voice-over narration or the flashback which are predominantly associated with the central male protagonist; and the film isn't centred on a male's investigation of a woman to

ascertain her guilt or innocence. On the other hand, the film is typical in having a transgressive woman and, thematically, deals with obsessive behaviour and alienation. By the time *Angel Face* was made, Robert Mitchum had become one of *film noir*'s leading icons; but the casting of Jean Simmons, who had been recently imported from England where she specialized in playing innocent but victimized heroines, is equally important to the film. Simmons' Diane, despite having certain features in common with the typical *femme fatale*, is far removed from this model. Preminger was, as Robin Wood has pointed out,⁸ the first director to provide her with a characterization that fully utilized the innocent/sexual tension underlying Simmons' persona. In this respect, it is instructive to compare *Angel Face* to *Where Danger Lives*, another Hughes produced *film noir* of the early '50s, in which Mitchum is also attracted to and becomes involved with an unstable woman who, it is gradually revealed, is homicidal. In John Farrow's film, Faith Domergue primarily exists to endorse the film's misogyny and complacent cynicism toward heterosexual relations which is what, in effect, the typical *film noir* is in great part about. *Where Danger Lives* is representative of the worst aspects of the tradition; in contrast, *Angel Face* is an example of a progressive usage of its conventions and thematics.

Gender and Power

AS I SAID, DIANE HAS FEATURES THAT relate her to the archetypal *femme fatale* of the *film noir* — she manipulates and eventually murders to get what she wants. But Diane differs in that her concern isn't gaining the power money accords, she already has access to this kind of power, and there is no ambiguity about her commitment to Frank, as she, before and after the trial, wants to testify to his innocence. On the narrative level, what motivates her behaviour is an obsessive attachment to her father and a pathological hatred of her step-mother. The latter Diane justifies through her perception that Catherine has destroyed her father's initiative to pursue his career as a writer. In effect, Diane is maintaining that Catherine has emasculated her father; but, as the film reveals, Charles is more or less contentedly indulging his cultural interests while living off his wife's money. If he harbours any resentment toward Catherine, it seems to be the product of his disdain for her middle-class sensibility. In contrast to her father's passive character, Diane's is active. Although she is ultra-feminine in appearance and works to reinforce gender roles (in her relations with her father, Diane is both an ideal daughter/child and comforting mother figure), Diane displays, in various ways, an identification with and understanding of the masculine identity. For instance, Diane's sports car associates her with risk-taking and adventure; and, to Frank, both Diane and her car are equally attractive. But, more tellingly, in her handling of Frank and Mary, whom she perceives as a rival, not unlike Catherine, whom she must eliminate, Diane knowingly plays on Frank's fears of being entrapped within domesticity. In the initial cafe scene, after Frank has telephoned Mary, Diane questions whether he's reporting in to his wife. Having spent the evening with Frank, Diane, the following day, meets with Mary, using the pretext that she wants to help the two financially, to undermine Mary's confidence in Frank. Later, when Diane and Frank again meet at the cafe, she implies that Mary's possessiveness prevented her from being receptive to the offer. To Frank's "Look, I'm a free agent," Diane replies, "... but you know what girls are." Clearly, Diane isn't speaking as a representative member of her own sex here but is, instead,

alluding to her and Frank's mutual understanding of 'what girls are' like. While giving Frank the impression that he is taking control of the situation, it is, in fact, Diane who is in control.

To both Diane and Frank, control is a major concern; for Diane it is linked to the possession of an individual, but for Frank it is a guarantee of his masculine identity. While there are numerous *films noirs* in which the lead male protagonist acknowledges his loss of control, which is often attributed to Fate, Frank, crucially, never fully perceives the possibility of this happening to him. The reason he doesn't, as the film makes clear, is bound up to a belief in male superiority. This is most evident in his treatment of Mary; although he quickly abandons her, he expects Mary to take him back when he's through with Diane. With Diane, Frank is more tentative in his actions, in part, because he knows there is more at stake. Then, too, Diane alternates in presenting herself as an innocent child seeking paternal approval and a sexually adult woman who wants him as her lover.

In *Angel Face*, there is an intimate relation between control or the loss of control and entrapment and, although the film doesn't make this perception gender-specific, it does suggest that it is an issue of particular importance to the male's identity. For instance, when Frank enters the Tremayne household as a chauffeur, he is already aware that Catherine, through her money, controls Charles but he is also confronted by the Japanese servant complaining that his wife, having become influenced by American habits, is trying to dominate him. Later, as Preminger indicates, Frank begins to sense Diane's control: he cross-cuts scenes of Diane with her father in the main house and scenes in which Frank, in his quarters, anxiously watches from the window and, then, with the realization that Diane isn't going to come, makes an attempt to telephone Mary to assert himself.

The film's central metaphor for the control/entrapment opposition is the car. As I mentioned, on the one hand, Diane's sports car associates her with masculinity; but, on the other, Frank sees Diane and the car as a means to fully regain his masculine self-image. (He was a professional racer before World War II.) To Frank, the car represents an image of phallic potency but, within the film's context, it increasingly becomes identified with his entrapment. Although Frank has been aware that Diane wants Catherine dead, it isn't until the murder (and, significantly, the murder weapon is Catherine's car) that he senses the possible threat she poses to his masculinity. (In *Angel Face*, in contrast to a typical *film noir* pattern, e.g., *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*, the woman doesn't need the man to help her commit the murder.) It is at this point that Frank attempts to disengage himself from Diane but the murder, in fact, leads to their marrying. After the trial, Diane gives Frank a potential access to the car when she bets it against Mary's taking him back; Mary, in refusing to do so, rejects his notions of masculine privilege. In the film's climactic sequence, the car becomes the site of Diane's control and Frank's entrapment. Diane, in offering to drive Frank to the bus station, seems to think that there is still a chance that she can convince him to stay. It isn't until Frank's shout, as he's opening the champagne, of "Watch it," as Diane steps on the gas, that Diane makes the decision to kill Frank and herself. The enraged look on Diane's face on hearing his command is similar to her look after Frank slapped her in their initial meeting. In that encounter, Diane returned the slap. Here, her instantaneous decision to kill them is her intuitive reaction to his assumption of a masculine prerogative that excludes any sense of her autonomy or individual identity.

Undoubtedly, *Angel Face* has one of the most devastating



ABOVE — Diane and Frank await the verdict. BELOW — Barrett threatens Diane with incarceration in a mental institution.



endings in the entire history of cinema. In part, the ending's impact is attributable, as it has been previously in the Catherine/Charles car scene, to the horrific manner in which the characters meet their death; but the impact also stems from the unexpectedness of Diane's action — arguably, the viewer, not unlike Frank, hasn't contemplated the possibility. (Although the viewer is provided with indications of how and when Catherine and Charles will be killed, the action, in its abruptness, is equally startling.) There are other *film noirs*, i.e., *Double Indemnity*, *Out of the Past*, in which, by the film's conclusion, the central couple is dead. But, in these films, although the victim-hero is fatally shot by the woman and he, in turn, precipitates her death, in *Angel Face* Frank isn't given this final assertion of his control over the woman. Also, Frank lacks the pessimistic romanticism often associated with the *noir* victim-hero who, through his death, achieves, as in *Out of the Past*, a degree of tragic nobility. In fact, when compared to the typical *film noir* male, Frank has nothing that connotes a 'glamorous' identity: he isn't, for instance, in an ambiguous position to the criminal world and the law nor is he, for that matter, guilty of committing a crime of any sort. (Diane's attorney, Fred Barrett, comes closest to being a male criminal figure in the film.)⁹ Then, too, it isn't Fate, which is never a factor in Preminger's films, that leads Frank to his death but, as I said, the conviction that his masculine identity secures him a controlling position in gender relations. On the other hand, Frank, more characteristic of the typical *film noir* male, tends to project his distrust of the feminine and a woman's wants onto the woman herself. Pointedly, in respect to this, when Diane, who has given him no reason to doubt her love, says, "Do you love me at all? I must know," he responds with "I suppose it's a kind of love . . . but, with a girl like you, how can a man be sure?"

Women and Film Noir

ALTHOUGH EACH OF THE THREE FEMALE protagonists of *Angel Face* relates to images of women associated with the *film noir*, Preminger doesn't provide these characters with the conventional identities that these types suggest, in each case subtly qualifying and undermining the spectator's expectations.

1. Diane identifies Catherine as a domineering, mean-minded woman who takes pleasure in humiliating her father and denying her wants; but Catherine, as she's presented, doesn't fulfill the bitch image Diane has assigned her. If Catherine denies Diane, as she does in deciding against financing Frank's sports car garage project, it is because she's trying to contain Charles' indulgence of her: in the scene which immediately follows Catherine's interviewing Frank about his plan, she, after attempting to telephone her lawyer about the project, is confronted by Charles who offers a perfunctory expression of his affection and then informs her that she's getting a \$300 bill for a dress he thought Diane should have. The scene, in addition to foregrounding Charles' cynical attitude towards his financial dependency, suggests that Catherine has cause to reprimand him. The scene also suggests, as does an earlier, intimate scene between Charles and Diane in which they jokingly dismiss the seriousness of Catherine's near asphyxiation, that Charles tends to promote a sex and class (Catherine's bourgeois identity vs. the 'aristocratic' refinement Diane is seen as sharing with her father) barrier between the two women. As Catherine isn't the monstrous woman Diane claims, her death is neither deserved nor gratifying. It isn't until she's killed her that Diane comes to this realization and recognizes that

Catherine, too, loved Charles.

2. In its Diane/Mary opposition, *Angel Face* employs the archetypes of the 'bad' and the 'good' woman; in the *film noir* cycle, the opposition occurs perhaps most notably in Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* in which the sexual Kathie/Jane Greer is contrasted to the innocent Ann/Virginia Huston who unconditionally commits herself to the film's hero, Jeff/Robert Mitchum, providing understanding, support and love. In Preminger's film, Mary, in various ways, contradicts the Ann stereotype. Unlike Ann, for instance, Mary is, as the film implicitly conveys, when she, in her slip, is unperturbed by Frank's unexpected arrival at her apartment, a sexualized woman. Clearly Mary isn't in the tradition of the chaste virginal type most classically exemplified by Janet Gaynor in *Sunrise*. And, as is made explicit, in her rejecting of Frank, she refuses to passively accept his unwillingness to make a commitment. When he attempts to return, Mary, after informing Bill that she wants to speak for herself, says: ". . . I want a marriage and not a competition. I want a husband and not a trophy that I have to defend over and over again." In a sense, Mary, in this scene, voices what Diane comes to feel about Frank's assumption of his independence. Although Mary and Bill can be taken as the film's 'good' couple, *Angel Face*, doesn't, in actuality, construct the conventional polarization of the two couples.

3. As I have indicated, Diane has certain characteristics which type her as a *femme fatale*; but, when compared to the archetypal transgressive woman of the *film noir*, Diane appears highly unconventional. Briefly to recapitulate: although she manipulates Frank, her motive isn't that he provides a means to her gaining power. What Diane wants is Frank's love; as with her father, Diane has made a total commitment to Frank, and at no point in the film does she betray him. Diane doesn't implicate Frank in her plans to kill Catherine and, after the deaths, she twice tries (in the second instance, Diane thinks that she may have already lost Frank) to testify that she alone was responsible for the killings. Uncharacteristically, in *Angel Face* it is Diane and not Frank who is the more vulnerable of the couple. Although Preminger makes Diane's vulnerability apparent in several scenes between her and Frank before the deaths of Catherine and Charles, it is after the trial sequence that he fully develops this aspect of her identity. Having returned to the Tremayne house, Diane, after telling Frank that she regrets what she's done, tries to explain herself and why she had wanted Catherine dead. While Diane's explanation doesn't adequately justify her actions, it is a genuine attempt on her part to make Frank understand her present and past feelings — to Diane's plea that he grant her a degree of forgiveness, Frank responds with indifference. But Diane's vulnerability is most strikingly depicted in the scenes in which she, after Frank has left her for Mary, wanders through the house entering Charles' room, then Frank's (I discuss these sequences in more detail later). In terms of the film's plot, these sequences aren't necessary, but they are crucial to Preminger's conception and sympathetic portrayal of Diane. Although Preminger doesn't employ technical devices to produce a viewer identification with Diane (in the above mentioned scenes, there are, for instance, no POV shots of the objects Diane associates with the presence of the two men), Preminger constructs, through narrative and characterization, a woman-centred *film noir* that sustains (unlike *Leave Her to Heaven*, in which Tierney's suicide is followed by a lengthy amount of footage devoted to the restoration of the 'good' couple) its

OVERLEAF — Frank and Diane get acquainted.





commitment to the woman who, ostensibly, is the film's *femme fatale* figure.

In Preminger's film, a reason why Mary and Bill don't become the alternative 'good' couple is that Diane and Frank aren't the typical 'bad' couple of the *film noir*. In their first meeting, Frank slaps Diane because she's hysterical; seemingly, what impresses Diane about Frank and prompts her to follow him, is his ease in taking control, his masculine display of authority. On the other hand, Frank's attraction to Diane is more obvious: her aggressiveness is a challenge, she's beautiful and rich. While Frank, at one point, tells Diane that they don't belong together because of their different social positions, Diane, for Frank, holds a fascination because of her class privilege. Although Diane is associated with aggressive sexuality and crime she isn't so much corrupt as spoiled and, consequently, she isn't even capable of corrupting Frank; she knowingly uses her access to money to keep Frank's interest, but he is no less guilty, fully realizing the financial potentials she offers him.¹⁰ The union of Mary and Bill can be read easily enough as the film's restoration of 'normality,' but in this case normality is defined as the absence of desires beyond the most commonplace and material; and, significantly, after the deaths of Diane and Frank, the film doesn't re-introduce Mary and Bill. Instead, the film's final shot is the arrival of the taxi-cab to pick up Frank, the driver blowing his horn to summon his fare from an empty house whose occupants are all dead. The shot symmetrically echoes the opening (the ambulance, driven by Frank, arriving at the house at night): one of the bleakest and least reassuring instances of closure and the 'restoration of normality' in the entire Hollywood cinema.

Preminger and mise-en-scène

GIVEN THAT *ANGEL FACE* IS A *FILM NOIR* the viewer would be led to assume that the film's identification figure is to be the lead male protagonist. (This is reinforced in the casting of Robert Mitchum who has top-billing in the film's opening credits.) As the initial scenes of *Angel Face* are centred on Frank's experiences, it seems that we are being encouraged to take him as our identification source; and, with Frank, the viewer is placed in relation to a disorientating situation in entering the Tremayne house. After leaving Catherine's bedroom, Frank and Bill are seen in a medium long shot walking down the stairs; as Bill exits the frame screen right, Frank's attention is drawn screen left towards an off-screen space in which someone is playing a piano. As Frank continues to look screen left and gradually walks in that direction the camera begins to pan left keeping him in the frame. Frank and the camera keep moving until Diane, sitting at the piano, is also in the frame. What is important here is that Preminger doesn't cut to Diane which would have suggested a POV shot from Frank's perspective; instead, by constructing the two-shot through camera movement to introduce Diane he discourages viewer identification with Frank and, simultaneously, her objectification.

I am not suggesting that the above-mentioned two-shot in itself prevents any further possible viewer identification with Frank. But it does initiate a detachment from Frank which is crucial to the film's concerns. In fact, up until Diane's killing of Catherine and Charles, Frank remains the more accessible of the two lead protagonists. To an extent, we are sharing his orientation towards Diane; this occurs because Preminger doesn't give us full access to either the intentions behind her

actions or her machinations: perhaps the most extreme example of the latter is that Preminger withholds the information that Diane has tampered with Catherine's car to transform it into a murder weapon. On the other hand, Preminger, through his close-ups of Diane, when she's playing the piano, produces a certain intimacy between her and the viewer which has no equivalent elsewhere in the film; although, paradoxically, with these close-ups, Diane is arguably at her most impenetrable. Prior to her killing of Catherine and Charles, Preminger allows for an ambiguous attitude on the viewer's part towards Diane but, in its aftermath, she becomes, although now a murderess, the emotional centre of the film. Diane and her situation become increasingly poignant while Frank, in his response to her, becomes increasingly unpleasant. The sequences in which Diane wanders the house are exemplary here: there are no POV shots, and Preminger keeps her in long shot throughout until the final track-in to medium shot. The sequence described below is preceded by Diane's wandering from Catherine's room to Charles' which she enters pausing at his chess board and picking up one of the pieces. Diane then proceeds to Frank's quarters initiating a two shot sequence: the first shot begins with Diane entering the quarters and glancing around; she then lifts up the cover of a suitcase to see it's empty, goes into an adjoining room and fondles a shirt on the bureau, returning to pick up Frank's sports jacket which she caresses; she then moves towards a window bench at which she and Frank had previously sat, pauses and exits the frame as the image fades indicating a time lapse. With a fade-in, the camera moves right from the window and tracks in towards Diane who is sitting in an armchair with Frank's jacket wrapped around her. She stares into space until she hears the sound of a car arriving at which point she gets up and exits the frame. *Angel Face*, among other things, illustrates that the viewer identification process is much more complicated than it is often assumed to be.

Throughout the film, Preminger's highly complex *mise-en-scène* is everywhere evident: for instance, the film's control/loss of control motif is visualized in his handling of the first murder sequence which is prefaced with a shot of Diane dropping an empty cigarette packet off the cliff on which the Tremayne house stands. The sequence itself begins with a shot of Diane at her bedroom window looking down at the pavement area and garage below; in addition to alluding to the height indication of the previous shot, it suggests that Diane presumes that she has control over what is about to happen. Preminger also introduces viewing height through a camera movement which begins as a tracking shot of Catherine and Charles as they move toward and then get into the car; as Charles closes Catherine's car door and exits the frame to get to his door the shot continues and the camera cranes up and tracks forward to frame in close-up the shift lever which Catherine has just placed in the drive position. While Diane thinks she has complete control, she doesn't know that her father will also be in the car. In the shot immediately preceding the murder scene, Diane sits down at her piano and begins to play; after the long shots of the car plunging down the cliff, Preminger dissolves back to Diane who, still playing the piano, maintains her illusion of control.

In *Angel Face*, there are more than 30 dissolves, the amount being, I think, as uncharacteristic of a Preminger film as it is of the typical classical Hollywood film. What these dissolves impart to the film is a degree of lyricism which is taken up in the piano music associated with Diane; like Diane's music, the dissolves function as counterpoint to the film's eruptions of violence which are particularly abrupt and brutal.

Conclusion

WITH *ANGEL FACE*, THE VIEWER IS CON-fronted by an extremely complex tangle in which class and gender concerns are pointedly raised: on the one hand, there is Diane's class privilege and, on the other, Frank's gender privilege. Contrary to Mayersberg's contention, Preminger isn't neutral either in his attitude towards his material or in his presentation of it. What his distanciation provides the viewer with is the opportunity to reflect on the concerns he is dealing with. This is altogether different from claiming that Preminger is objective in treating his subject. Mayersberg, in the *Movie* of 1962, presented this alleged 'objectivity' on the level of the individual: its function was to leave the spectator free to judge the motivations and actions of the characters. But Preminger's attitude to his characters is, as I have tried to show, neither neutral nor undefinable (however complex); the function of the distance upon which his *mise-en-scène* insists is to allow us to pass beyond personal motivation to the awareness of the web of class and gender positions within which they struggle.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jacques Rivette. "The Essential," *Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s Vol. 1*, Ed. Jim Hillier. (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1985): pp. 132-135.
2. Paul Mayersberg. "From *Laura* to *Angel Face*," *Movie*, No. 2 (September 1962): pp. 14-16.
3. *Bonjour Tristesse* is a fascinating companion piece to *Angel Face*. In *The Films in My Life* (Simon and Schuster, 1975), Francois Truffaut back-handedly suggests that Françoise Sagan used *Angel Face* as her inspiration for her celebrated novel.
4. Molly Haskell. *From Reverence to Rape*. (Penguin Books Inc, 1974): p. 159.
5. Contrary to those critics who claim that the *film noir* and the melodrama are polar opposites, I see them as complementary genres as both are centrally concerned with gender relations and particularly the entrapment thematic.
6. Set in Beverly Hills, the film begins with ambulance drivers, Frank/Robert Mitchum and Bill/Kenneth Tobey, answering a call from a hill-top mansion where Catherine Tremayne/Barbara O'Neil has almost been asphyxiated by gas in her bedroom. Mrs. Tremayne thinks someone tried to murder her but her husband, Charles/Herbert Marshall, discounts the possibility, insisting it was an accident. About to leave the house, Frank finds Diane Tremayne/Jean Simmons in the living room playing the piano; when he tells her that Mrs. Tremayne, her stepmother, will survive, she becomes hysterical. Frank and Bill return to the hospital and Diane follows in her sports car. At a nearby cafe, where Frank is attempting to call his girlfriend Mary/Mona Freeman, Frank and Diane meet again. Frank cancels his date with Mary and takes Diane out. Diane tells Frank that she and her father are very close much to the annoyance of her stepmother. Later, she offers Frank a live-in job as the family chauffeur suggesting that Mrs. Tremayne might help finance his plans to start a sports car garage. When Mrs. Tremayne withdraws her support, Diane says she did so to spite her. Soon after, Diane claims that Mrs. Tremayne tried to asphyxiate her but Frank finds the story highly suspect. Diane, sensing that Frank is becoming uncomfortable with his situation and intends to leave, convinces him to stay until she can sell her jewels which will give them the money to buy a garage business and start a new life together. In actuality, Diane has decided to make another attempt at murdering her stepmother: when backed out of the family garage, Mrs. Tremayne's car is positioned near the edge of a steep drop-off; Diane removes a mechanism from the car so that it remains in reverse when Mrs. Tremayne puts the car shift into the drive position and steps on the gas. Although Diane's plan succeeds, she inadvertently also kills her father who was a passenger in the car.

An insurance investigation leads to the conclusion that the car was tampered with. As Frank is a mechanic and Diane's suitcase was found in his room, they are charged with murdering the Tremaynes to get Mrs. Tremayne's money. After recovering from the shock of her father's death,

Diane tells her attorney, Fred Barrett/Leon Ames, that she alone was responsible for the deaths. Barrett, thinking that the admission will raise issues about Diane's mental state and, more importantly, tie up the estate which she inherits, argues that a confession at this point would be taken as an attempt on her part to protect Frank. Intending to exploit the jury's sentimental notions regarding young lovers, Barrett has Frank marry Diane before the trial. Through a combination of insufficient evidence and Barrett's manipulation, Frank and Diane are acquitted. After a return to the Tremayne house, Diane tells Frank that she regrets what she's done; she also says that her love for her father blinded her to the fact that Catherine also loved him. But Frank offers her no compassion; he informs Diane that he wants a divorce and intends to return to Mary. Telling Frank that Mary, unlike herself, couldn't love a man who might have murdered, Diane bets her sports car against Mary's taking him back. Since Frank's rejection, Mary has become involved with Bill and, when Frank confronts her with his return, she rejects him on the grounds that she no longer wants to compete for his affections. Diane, thinking that she may have lost Frank, goes to Barrett to make an official statement wanting both to clear Frank's name and appease her guilt. Barrett says that her confession is now pointless and advises that, if she persists, her sanity will be questioned. When Frank returns Diane's car, he tells her that he's going to Mexico. She offers to drive him to the bus station. With both in the car, Diane throws the car shift into reverse and backs it off the drop-off, killing Frank and herself.

7. Otto Preminger. *Preminger: An Autobiography* (Doubleday & Company, Inc 1977): pp. 123-126.
8. Robin Wood. *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Volume III Actors and Actresses*. (St. James Press, 1986): pp. 576-577.
9. Barrett is also associated with the control/loss of control motif in his threatening Diane that she will wind up in a mental institution if she persists in wanting to confess to the killings.
10. In this respect, the Catherine/Charles and Diane/Frank relationships reflect each other.

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Scott (Alan Curtis) with the 'phantom lady.'



***Phantom Lady*, Cornell Woolrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic**

by Tony Williams

DESPITE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE WISconsin-Madison neo-formalist school,¹ *film noir* still remains to be reckoned with as an important movement in Hollywood narrative both in terms of its stylistic innovations and subversion of patriarchal gender norms.² It is in the latter connection that the work of Gaylyn Studlar promises significant gains in its application to *film noir*.³ The aim of this paper is to apply Studlar's thesis to the writer Cornell Woolrich and Robert Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1944) noting both its relevance and the oppositions which the film text counters to a complete supremacy of the masochistic aesthetic's operations.⁴

Studlar's work questions the Freudian-Lacanian-Metzian

theoretical hegemony of cinema spectatorship and "woman's place." In Freud's scenario the child renounces pre-Oedipal bisexuality and the mother as 'love object' in order to submit to patriarchal Law and castration. However, Studlar emphasizes Gilles Deleuze's work on masochism, challenging basic Freudian tenets of sado-masochistic duality, to reveal a hitherto neglected "masochistic aesthetic" in the field of psychoanalysis. In contrast to sadism's elevation of the father, masochism promotes the mother in a particular textual fashion. A work such as Masoch's *Venus in Furs* contains a world that is "mythical, persuasive, aesthetically oriented, and centered around the idealizing, mystical exaltation of love for the punishing woman. In her ideal form, as representative of the powerful oral mother, the female in the masochistic scenario is not sadistic, but must inflict cruelty in love to fulfill her role in the mutually agreed upon masochistic

scheme."⁵

This psychoanalytic model naturally challenges Laura Mulvey's visual pleasure argument which asserts that "male scopophilic desires must centre around control — never identification with or submission to the female."⁶ Cinema spectatorship also becomes less of a predominantly masculine activity with its emphasis upon the sadistic male gaze. In Studlar's view, the spectator (male or female) regresses to the infantile pre-Oedipal phase, submitting to (and identifying with) the overpowering presence of the screen and the woman on it. Spectatorship and identification thus become a more complex process than in Mulvey's original formulation, having a bisexual component which has associations with the early phases of pre-Oedipal developments.

"Through the mobility of multiple, fluid identifications, the cinematic apparatus allows the spectator to experience the pleasure of satisfying 'the drive to be both sexes' that is repressed in everyday life dominated by the secondary process. The cinema provides an enunciative apparatus that acts as a protective guise like fantasy or dream to permit the temporary fulfillment of what Kubie describes as 'one of the deepest tendencies in human nature'; but like the wish and counterwish to fuse with or separate from the mother, the wish to change gender identity is also an ambivalent desire."⁷

Fulfillment of desire may also involve destruction, a fact true not just of films such as *The Devil is a Woman* but also of Cornell Woolrich novels such as *Waltz into Darkness*.

It is important to understand the masochistic phenomenon historically and not regard it in the same universal a-historic manner as Freud's original formulation of the Oedipus complex. Recent research has shown that masochism increased dramatically in the early modern period of Western culture that coincided with "increased emphasis on individuality."⁸ Viewing several case histories Baumeister argues that "masochism is essentially an attempt to escape from self, in the sense of achieving a loss of high-level self-awareness."⁹ Although he notes evidence of desires to escape sex roles,¹⁰ enacting "fantasies that are radically divorced from normal reality,"¹¹ among predominantly upper socioeconomic white males, his findings have further implications. The masochistic scenario may illustrate a tendency of artist (as well as audience) to escape oppressive gender roles that western capitalist society has defined as "normal" in prescribing arbitrary definitions of "self." In the light of these important theories both the place of Cornell Woolrich and a 1944 film adaptation of one of his works merit close attention.

Author of *Phantom Lady* (under the pseudonym "William Irish") Cornell Woolrich (1904-68) is now recognized as an important force in the literary background of *film noir*, offering a significant alternative to the 'hard-boiled' school of Hammett, Cain and Chandler with their emphasis on phallic pleasures of control and mastery.¹² In terms of recent critical investigations of "male hysteria" and gender construction Woolrich's work offers fertile territory. Recognizing the male hysteric tradition in both literature and film, Jonathan Rosenbaum comments that Woolrich "can give it a sexual undertone without ever making its meaning strictly gender-based as it is frequently in Poe and Hemingway, Sternberg and Peckinpah. His heroines tend to be phallic while his heroes often verge on being sissies and fear becomes the universal democratic place on which they can meet as equals."¹³ Woolrich's fervent emotional style, his powerful heroines (such as Julie Killeen of *The Bride Wore Black* [1940] who reduces her male victims to states of pre-Oedipal passivity) and the frenzied amnesiac of *The Black Curtain* (1942) who has lost masculine control of his destiny, are dynamic figures in Woolrich's world but have not been depicted in American movies.

Hollywood investment in patriarchal norms of gender construction may be a significant reason for this although, as we shall see, it cannot entirely suppress this alternative as in the case of *Phantom Lady*. In a recent article on Robert Siodmak, J.P. Telotte notes that "Siodmak's films appear almost classic texts for illustrating gender tensions that were surfacing in post-World War II America."¹⁴ Although the film *Phantom Lady* came out in 1944 it is an anticipation of those subversive gender tensions which would emerge in *Out of the Past*, *Gilda*, *Criss Cross* and *Night and the City*. They are key texts in illustrating the insecurity of male control when attempts were made to reintroduce the pre-war patriarchal status quo. Writing of Siodmak's work (but in terms also applicable to *Phantom Lady*) Telotte notes of the director's male characters that "What finally makes Siodmak's world so disturbing though, is that his male characters too seem fluid, potentially phantoms, as if they too were infected by a contagious evaporation of the self."¹⁵ This influence may be attributed to the work of Cornell Woolrich and the dominance in his writings of the masochistic aesthetic.

Studlar's description of masochism as an obsessive recreation of the movement between "revelation and concealment, appearance and disappearance, rejection and seduction" accurately resembles Woolrich's classic novels, especially *The Bride Wore Black* (1940) and *Black Angel* (1942), which contain worlds of "a sensual heterocosm in which the female is mystically idealized as the loving inflictor of punishment."¹⁶ Both Woolrich and Edward Hopper were influenced by cinema in their respective artistic mediums.¹⁷ There are many parallels between Studlar's research and the work of Woolrich which demand further investigation.

"If the male spectator identifies with the masochistic male character, he is aligned with a position usually assigned to the female. If he rejects identification with this position, one alternative is to identify with the position of power: the female who inflicts pain. In either case, the male spectator assumes a position associated with the female. In the former, he identifies with the culturally assigned feminine characteristics exhibited by the male within the masochistic scenario; in the latter he identifies with the powerful female who represents the mother of pre-Oedipal life and the primary identification."¹⁸

Woolrich has much in common with this scenario. Biographical research has revealed his mother fixation, bi-sexual tendencies and inability to follow the Oedipal trajectory of 'normal' human development. His first, F. Scott Fitzgerald-influenced novel, *Cover Charge* (1927), introduced the passive male hero, often at the mercy of the powerful female, who would frequently appear in his later work. but his most powerful fiction appeared in the decade of *film noir*, the '40s, often in the "Black" series of novels. Most of his work was filmed within a year or so of its initial appearance either under his own name or his pseudonyms, William Irish and George Hopley.¹⁹ Woolrich was often displeased with the film versions of his work.²⁰ One of his major works remains to be filmed while two appeared as films some 20 years after their initial appearance as novels.

Cornell Woolrich	William Irish	George Hopley
1940. <i>The Bride Wore Black</i>		
1941. <i>The Black Curtain</i>		
1942. <i>Black Alibi</i>	<i>Phantom Lady</i>	
1943. <i>The Black Angel</i>		
1944. <i>The Black Path of Fear</i>	<i>Deadline At Dawn</i>	
1945.		<i>The Night Has A Thousand Eyes</i>
1947.	<i>Waltz Into Darkness</i>	
1948. <i>Rendezvous In Black</i>	<i>I Married A Dead Man</i>	

The late appearance of *The Bride Wore Black* and *Waltz into Darkness* (Truffaut's *La Sirène du Mississippi*) as films is mysterious.²¹ However, one reason may be the fact that the heroines of these works were such powerful threats to patriarchal ideology that they could not be successfully incorporated into the '40s norms of Hollywood gender representations. The only comparison is *Detour's* (1945) heroine (the appropriately named actress Ann Savage). Although we are familiar with the *femme fatales* of *Murder My Sweet* (1944), *Double Indemnity* (1945), and *Out of the Past* (1948), all these pale into insignificance when compared to Julie Killeen and Bonnie. Both women are far too powerful to gain access even into the contemporary cracks within the dominant Hollywood ideology that made *film noir* possible.

Julie Killeen is a powerful avenging figure, able to disguise herself by embodying male romantic fantasies of the "ideal female" and eventually killing her victims after reducing them to positions of helpless dependency. Julie wreaks so much damage upon patriarchal order that even the traditionally imposed Hays Code ending of "punishment for her sins" would have appeared ludicrous. Bonnie in *Waltz into Darkness* is more of a castrating threat to male power than Julie.

Rendezvous in Black has never been filmed to date. Although it is a male re-working of *The Bride Wore Black*, its assault on patriarchal gender construction makes it too threatening. The avenging hero murders the wives and girlfriends of his victims in revenge for the death of his sweetheart. The novel makes clear his excessive over-idealization of his lost love and his collapse into male hysteria. Thus his ambivalent sexual nature, hysterical actions and passivity before death reveal him as another Woolrich male who does not operate according to the masculine action dynamics of the Law of the Father. The hero of *The Black Curtain* exhibits hysteria when he discovers that his amnesia has caused loss of masculine control in society. This dilemma was excellently acted by Cary Grant in the half-hour radio version.²² In *The Black Angel*, a quiet housewife becomes an avenging female to save her husband. In one case her actions indirectly cause the death of one of Woolrich's recurrent male victims on the altar of romanticism. Like Julie, the heroine "becomes an idealized, powerful figure, both dangerous and comforting"²³ — a role which Carol Richmond of *Phantom Lady* plays, causing the death of two male victims. While Scott Henderson becomes passive and impotent on death row, Carol is active on his behalf, thus reversing the typical male-female trajectory. She turns from sweet secretary to threatening pre-Oedipal mother and sexually active *femme fatale*. Although *Deadline at Dawn* substitutes the symbolic function of the city expressing capitalist alienation for the powerful female as a main narrative device the novel's heroine still has actively to urge her passive boyfriend to save himself from the accusation of murder. *Black Alibi* is a notable exception to Woolrich's other work but this may be due to the novelist's experimenting with the "sadistic" aesthetic in crime fiction. Another explanation may lie in the fact that the original short story revealed the hero as the perpetrator of the crime.²⁴ Although the novel made him innocent this initial narrative device may explain the virtual absence of the masochistic motif.

Woolrich may have influenced other films. Based on Steve Fisher's novel, *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941) modelled the psychotic cop Cornell on Woolrich. In what was possibly an inside reference to the real-life author, the film cast Laird Cregar as Cornell. Although his resemblance to Woolrich was non-existent (unlike the novel's description), the industry knew of Cregar's unhappy existence as a bi-sexual at the

time.²⁵ Burt Lancaster's roles in Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946) and *Criss Cross* (1948) are undeniable echoes of Woolrich's doomed male victims of romanticism, especially in their respective manipulation by *femme fatales* Ava Gardner and Yvonne de Carlo. Another example is Richard Widmark's performance in Dassin's *Night and the City* (1950). Before his death he collapses into the arms of Gene Tierney like a little boy before his mother.

Although modifying Woolrich's short story, Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) preserved the hero's impotent role as well as developing the cinematic apparatus motif.²⁶ This also occupied an important element in *The Window* (1950) where a little boy observes a murder committed by two dark mirror image parental figures, watching a window as if viewing a cinema screen. The dark parents are the alter egos of his economically oppressed father and mother (Arthur Kennedy and Barbara Hale) turning to robbery, murder and prostitution to survive inside capitalism. It is not without significance that the biggest threat to the boy comes from the dark mother (Ruth Roman).

Woolrich's "fervent emotionalism,"²⁷ male passivity before either avenging female or dark universal malevolent powers, and the role of suspense (usually presented as a race against time as in *Phantom Lady*, *Deadline at Dawn* and *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes*)²⁸ are all integral components of the masochistic aesthetic. Louis Bernard's tortuous romanticism and passivity in *Waltz into Darkness* represents the imaginative masochistic desire for reunion with the mother. It is finally realized in that "kiss of farewell" when Bonnie changes from hostile oral mother into the good maternal spirit:

"Their very souls seemed to flow together. *To try to blend forever into one.* [Italics mine] Then, despairing, failed and were separated, and one slipped down into darkness and one remained in the light."²⁹

Bonnie thus represents that "dialectical unity between liberation and death, the bonding of Eros with Thanatos that places the former in the service of the latter."³⁰ She is the idealized mother to Louis's pre-Oedipal child.³¹

Like *Deadline At Dawn* and "Three O'Clock,"³² *Phantom Lady* contains Woolrich's hysteric suspense formula of the race against time. It resembles a compulsive Freudian *fort/da* game in which death (and return to the womb) is the dominant motif. Deleuze's observations concerning the masochistic's suspension of the ultimate gratification of death, the obsessive return to the continuously re-enacted moment of separation from the oral mother, are all relevant to understanding Woolrich's technique in novels such as *The Black Path of Fear*.

Studlar's investigation of the masochistic aesthetic has certainly great relevance to the novels of Cornell Woolrich and the Dietrich/von Sternberg cycle of films.³³ But when we examine the film *Phantom Lady*, we find that the masochistic scenario is more in the nature of a crack within the dominant patriarchal ideology rather than an overpowering element in the filmic text. We must remember that every film is a complex of intersecting elements in potential competition with each other. Also it may be under the influence of social and historical factors that govern what may be adapted at any particular time. According to Frederic Jameson, a set of circumstances may circumscribe an area beyond which any text can not stray. Any given historical moment may foreground some generic possibilities and make others unlikely.³⁴ In the case of *Phantom Lady*, both the novel and film are lacking in comparison to *The Bride Wore Black*, *Waltz into Darkness* and *Rendezvous in Black* where the masochistic aes-



ABOVE — The jam session. BELOW — The 'mad artist.'



thetic is more fully realized. As well as the reasons listed above for the imperfect realization of Woolrich's subversive gender depictions on screen, we must remember the dominance of the Oedipal trajectory of classical Hollywood cinema in which the female becomes subjected to male control either by death or marriage.³⁵ At the climax of the film Carol is confined to the office and the offer of monogamy. However, enough remains of the masochistic model in the film to argue that the aesthetic, if not dominant, is there as a fissure, a gap in the ideology which permits the partial expression of the female voice. It exists as an alternative operation against patriarchal control of the text. Even if subdued at the climax it is still there, attempting to strain against narrative bounds.

In both novel and film Carol Richmond fulfills the role of the oral mother threatening two males in her quest to save Scott Henderson from the electric chair. She intimidates the barman of the Anselmo by usurping that prerogative which Mulvey associates with male-dominated cinema — the sadistic power of the gaze. She pursues him and causes his death in a manner reminiscent of Deleuze's description of the "bad" pre-Oedipal mother:

She appealed to them, self-possessedly but loudly enough to be heard, and the calm clarity of her voice stopped them all short. "Don't. Let him alone. Let him go about his business."

But there was no warmth nor compassion about it, just a terrible steely impartiality. As if to say: Leave him to me. He's mine.³⁶

In visually dominating the drummer, Cliff, by acting out the sexually powerful *femme fatale* role Carol assumes the uterine mother's function with its associations of prostitution.³⁷ This is excellently realized in that "jam session" sequence in the cellar lit in the German expressionist manner in which Carol lords it over drugged musicians. As in the Dietrich/von Sternberg films "the *femme fatale* does not steal her 'controlling gaze' from the male, but exercises the authority of the preOedipal mother whose gaze forms the child's first experience of love and power."³⁸

But the narrative cannot allow Carol's total dominance. In the last 10 minutes she is reduced to the helpless position of the threatened, screaming female before her last-minute rescue by Inspector Burgess, representative of the Law of the Father. Also, the male victims are figures whom the masculine audience can easily reject. They are not Robert Mitchum of *Out of the Past* nor Glenn Ford in *Gilda*. The audience is removed from them.

This explains Siodmak's transformation of Woolrich's "normal" murderous engineer, Lombard, into Franchot Tone's stereotyped Mad Artist, "complete with delusions of grandeur, symbolic migraine headaches, and overdone hand gestures."³⁹ He appears to owe more to Siodmak's German expressionist interests rather than the hard-boiled world of '40s *noir*. However, this change is easily understandable when we remember traditional concepts of masculine depiction in Hollywood cinema and its tendency to project unmasculine features of lack of control, impotence and emotionalism on to figures such as Elisha Cook Jr with whom the audience would find it impossible to identify.⁴⁰ Lombard's original engineer function is too closely associated with male control. The film thus seeks to make him different. However, in the novel he is one of Woolrich's doomed victims on the altar of romanticism. He exhibits qualities usually associated with stereotypical notions of the female and becomes a plaything for the whims of unseen, oral mother, Marcella Henderson:

He'd spent most of his life around oil-fields in God forsaken parts of the world; and he hadn't had much experience with women. He didn't have any sense of humour about things like that. He took her seriously. And of course she liked that part of it all the better, that made the game more real After all, when a guy's that age, and not a kid any more, he takes it hard when you kick his heart around like that."⁴¹

Franchot Tone's Marlow is a Nietzschean mad artist. He is associated with modern art artifacts as well as a Van Gogh self-portrait. The film uses these tactics to remove him as a threat to typical definitions of the masculine. A mad modernist artist is less of a threat to gender stereotypes than a mad, masculine engineer.⁴²

But although the masochistic aesthetic is not completely dominant either in novel or film enough traces remain of its presence as a subversive influence. Examination of both works reveals underlying tensions which are not completely recuperated despite attempts to do so.

The novel begins and ends with the male perspective. It opens with Scott Henderson. Three pages describe his attitudes before he notices the mysterious female. The novel ends with Inspector Burgess's final moral to the reunited couple, Scott and Carol: "If you've got to have a moral, I give you this: don't ever take strangers to the theatre unless you've got a good memory for faces."⁴³

This resembles the classic detective fiction discourse in which everything is satisfactorily resolved by a controlling agent in the type of fiction associated with Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and the 'hard-boiled' school. It is an unsatisfactory climax to a novel which exhibits so many of Woolrich's better concepts — Scott's passivity before his fate, Carol's active control in trying to save his life by taking on female roles that are merely the construction of male fantasies,⁴⁴ and the bi-sexual implications of such role transferences. Carol is instrumental in trapping Lombard in the novel — "The best man of us all" — as Inspector Burgess describes her.

The film's opening scenes differ. From the close-up of her hat as the camera tracks out *before* Scott enters the bar Anne Terry's control over the male narrative (and Scott) receives emphasis. Anne refuses to give her name, thus rejecting male control of her identity. Scott's inability to learn her name is later ridiculed by the voice of the unseen District Attorney (Milburn Stone) at his trial.

Scott's return home further reveals his impotence before the dominant female presence. As he enters his apartment calling his wife, a cop (Regis Toomey) switches on the light. Inspector Burgess stands beneath Marcella's portrait with an accusing look on his face. The camera pans left in the next shot when Scott discovers Marcella's dead body. Acting as if malevolent agents of the dead Marcella, the cops stand cynically watching.

Marcella's portrait appears predominantly throughout the following interrogation. She dominates Scott in death as she did in life.⁴⁵ His masculine world of "Engineer" is undermined by Marcella's image controlling the frame. The camera pans right as he speaks of his marital difficulties whilst walking away from the picture. It pans left as Scott returns to his original position beneath Marcella surrounded by the two cops. As he begins to relate his evening's humiliation — "She just sat there and laughed. She kept laughing at me" — Marcella's portrait appears at a canted angle leftwards. Toomey is to the right of the portrait. He acts as chorus of the patriarchal world view — "Nothing makes a man madder than that!" The portrait also dominates the frame in the next shot when Scott tells of Marcella's refusing

a divorce. Another cop makes the sardonic comment, "Making a patsy of you, eh?"

Thus the visuals explicitly associate the cops as Marcella's functionaries in reducing Scott into helpless masochistic passivity. The casting of Alan Curtis as Scott, an actor not particularly noted for predominantly masculine roles, reinforces this interpretation.⁴⁶ He breaks down like the traditional 'hysterical female' after seeing Marcella's body carried out by uncaring medics.

The cops surround Scott on either side. A slow tracking shot begins until he becomes isolated in close-up. As the camera moves in it emphasizes Scott's passivity. The envious class-conscious cops make hostile comments about his clothes in a manner usually associated with male comments about female costume:

"A very neat dresser, Mr. Henderson."

"Yeah, everything goes together."

"Pretty tie, expensive. I wish I could afford it."

Finally, the scene (with its visual associations of rape) ends with Burgess noticing that Scott's tie does not match his suit. The appropriate tie is round his wife's neck.

In the next sequence we meet Scott's secretary, Carol, played by Ella Raines. If Alan Curtis was not sufficiently 'masculine' to be a successful Hollywood hero, Ella Raines was conversely not sufficiently 'feminine,' so her career was relatively brief.⁴⁷ *Phantom Lady* was her most significant film. Carol is efficient enough to run Scott's office on her own. But she is under the dominance of patriarchal ideology. Scott's voice over the dictaphone giving her daily orders limits any possibility she may have of independent control in the masculine world of Scott Henderson Incorporated.

However, when Scott receives the death sentence Carol becomes an avenging female, pursuing the barman and drummer Cliff Milburn with the power of the gaze to gain information, thus usurping a traditional male prerogative. In the car Carol is transformed by harsh *noir* lighting into both a Woolrich avenging fury and hostile oral mother figure. Changing into her 'hooker' role she entices Cliff by manipulating his look for the purposes of her own control.

But the filmic text can only allow Carol so much latitude before two male forces of patriarchy intervene. The first is Inspector Burgess/Thomas Gomez who offers his support. Thus, the power of the Law will eventually dominate the narrative until it rescues Carol after she has relinquished the power of the avenging female by collapsing into hysteria.

The second figure is Marlow who represents the dark forces of male chaos, an opposing figure to patriarchy-prescribed gender roles. Entering Cliff's room after Carol has fled, his speech not only reiterates the 'mad artist' discourse by which the narrative can make him an 'other' but also reveals his female perception: "She was magnificent. She loathed you but she went with you. She would have humiliated herself to make you talk."

As portrayed by Franchot Tone, Lombard/Marlow is clearly a victim of socially restrictive gender definitions of male and female roles. Although the narrative attempts to depict him as a mad artist, an 'other,' it is clear that his insecurities in bearing an oppressive male role in capitalist society have overpowered him. Rejected by Marcella, he has psychotically erupted against an imagined threat to his socially constructed ego. Yet, Tone's performance contains a mixture of sympathy and pathos that clearly marks him as victim rather than monster. His act was the ultimate expression of male hysteria when his everyday 'masculine' role became as impotent as that of Scott's before the cops. Like Scott he has clearly repressed 'feminine' qualities which

explode in murderous expression.

Up to Marlow's appearance Carol has occupied the role of the avenging Woolrich female. But the film's patriarchal narrative form can bear the strain no longer. A progressive subordination of her role begins until she is no longer the 'threat' but 'the threatened.' She must lose all trace of her previous pre-Oedipal status by now occupying a subordinate position within the 'sadistic' portion of the narrative in which she is threatened by Marlow until Inspector Burgess can successfully intervene.

When Carol eventually finds Anne Terry, the film clearly reveals that females are also *victims* of patriarchal ideology. After the death of her fiancé, Anne has collapsed into a nervous breakdown. She is as much a victim of romantic love ideology as is Lombard/Marlow. When Carol discovers her, Anne is living in her grandmother's house where she "had lived all her life." Dominated by the dead hand of the past, Anne tells Carol about her grandmother. "She was very happy here. She married the man she loved. I'll never marry." However, recognizing Carol's similar love (or entrapment) she gives her the hat needed for evidence before therapeutically breaking down in recognizing the death of her love.

After Inspector Burgess's rescue Carol once more occupies the subordinate secretarial role after Scott has seemingly resumed the boss demeanor. But although the film attempts to impose a 'happy' ending by means of the classical Hollywood marriage motif,⁴⁸ the climax can be read in a much more subversive manner. Despite the film's ideological project of undermining Carol's dominant role by attempting to assert male control at the climax, both the opening and closing shots significantly operate against this. A tension is created in the overall structure impossible to recuperate successfully.

We remember that the film began with a close-up of Anne's hat. The enigmatic female, not the male (as in Woolrich's original), begins the narrative. At the climax Inspector Burgess and Scott await Carol. Both men leave as if nothing has happened. Scott tells Carol of the dictaphone messages awaiting her. Rescued from the electric chair he appears to show no gratitude to her. The formal boss-secretary relationship appears to resume as Carol presses the vocal instrument of male control.

Listlessly listening she hears Scott's marriage proposal. "You're having dinner with me tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night." The camera tracks in to a close-up as the message plays. It stops as the dictaphone needle sticks in the groove endlessly repeating "every night." An enigmatic look of pleasure emerges on her face in the final image.

Two interpretations are possible here. First, the climax represents the successful Oedipal project of subordinating the female to the male. As victim Carol takes pleasure in her own future oppression as both wife and secretary. But a second interpretation is also more likely. A contradiction certainly exists in the combination of needle sticking and a triumphant look on Carol's face. The dictaphone is symbolic of male control, a control that the film reveals as being non-existent in the cases of Scott, Marlow, the barman, and Cliff. Even Inspector Burgess admits his error about Scott's guilt to Carol mid-way in the film. We remember the powerful *femme fatale* role which she occupied in her pursuit of the guilty males. It is hard to believe that she will ever successfully settle down into the passive role of wife/secretary. The needle sticks on the words, "every night," the time in which Carol was at her most powerful. Carol's triumphant look may assert the latent presence of the 'masochistic aesthetic' still awaiting another re-emergence in opposition to patriar-

chal power. The needle sticking opposes the male control of the voice. Carol's close-up thus represents the coming triumph of the female outside the confines of the text. This scene anticipates those future victories of her sister "phantom ladies" in a later generation. □

FOOTNOTES

1. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press 1985), pp. 74-77; Edward Branigan, *Point of View*.
2. For a relevant selection of work in this field see Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir américain* (Paris: Editions d'aujourd'hui 1976; 1953 reprint; Raymond Durgnat, "The family tree of film noir," *Cinema* (Britain) 6/7 (August 1970): pp. 48-56; Paul Schrader, "Notes on film noir," *Film Comment*, 10.1 (January-February 1974): pp. 30-35; E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in film noir* (London: British Film Institute 1978); Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press 1979); Jon Tuska, *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press 1984).
3. Studlar's doctoral thesis (to be published this year by the University of Illinois Press) in its application to cinema deals exclusively with the Paramount Dietrich/von Sternberg films. For an outline of her position see Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 9.4 (January-February 1985): pp. 267-82; and "Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetic," *Journal of Film and Video* 37.2 (Spring 1985): pp. 5-26. However, the findings are equally applicable to other areas of cinema such as *film noir*, horror and the musical. I am grateful to Professor Studlar for her suggestions in correspondence dated June 24th, 1987 and November 1st, 1987. See also Linda Bundtzen, "Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel and Now Alien," *Film Quarterly* 50.3 (Spring 1987): pp. 11-17; and Linda Mizejewski, "Women, Monsters and the Masochistic Aesthetic in Fosse's Cabaret," *Journal of Film and Video* 39.4 (Fall 1987): pp. 5-17.
4. This article is based upon a paper delivered at the Mid-West Popular Culture Association Conference on October 16, 1987 at the Meramec campus of St. Louis Community College. I am grateful to the *CineAction!* editorial group for suggested revisions.
5. Studlar, "Masochism," p. 267; see also Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: George Braziller 1971).
6. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.1 (Autumn 1975): pp. 6-18. See also the criticism by D.N. Rodowick, "The Difficulty of Difference," *Wide Angle* 5.1 (1982): pp. 7-9.
7. Studlar, "Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetic," p. 13.
8. See Roy F. Baumeister, "Masochism as Escape from Self," *The Journal of Sex Research*, 25.1 (February 1988): pp. 28-59, especially 51.
9. Baumeister, pp. 28-29.
10. Baumeister, p. 41.
11. Baumeister, p. 45.
12. On Woolrich as the real literary inspiration of *film noir* see Stephen Jenkins, "Dashiell Hammett and Film Noir: Out of the Vase?," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 49.no586 (November 1982): p. 276. See also John Baxter, "Something more than night," *The Film Journal* 2.4 (1975): p. 9, who cites a passage from Woolrich's *The Black Path of Fear* (1944) as contributing towards *noir* lighting effects. This is also mentioned by Bordwell 77 who cites 1940s comic strips and German expressionist lighting techniques.
13. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Black Window: Cornell Woolrich," *Film Comment* 20.5 (September-October 1984): pp. 36-38.

Inspector Burgess (left) with Carol and Marlow.



14. J.P. Telotte, "Siodmak's Phantom Women and Noir Narrative," *Film Criticism* 11.3 (Spring 1987): p. 2.
15. Telotte, p. 9.
16. Studlar, p. 8.
17. Woolrich briefly worked as a Hollywood screenwriter, taking the pseudonym of scenarist "William Irish" for four of his novels. See Francis M. Nevins Jr., "Introduction," Cornell Woolrich writing as William Irish, *Phantom Lady* (New York: Ballantine 1982), pp. ix-xiii. For one example of cinema in Woolrich see *The Black Angel* (New York: Ballantine 1982), p. 131. On Hopper's use of cinema see Erika L. Doss, "Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks* and *Film Noir*," *Postscript* 2.2 (Winter 1983): pp. 14-36.
18. Studlar, p. 14.
19. Hopley was Woolrich's maternal middle name. See Francis M. Nevins Jr., "Introduction," Cornell Woolrich writing as George Hopley, *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* (New York: Ballantine 1982), p. xiv.
20. See the February 2, 1947 letter of Woolrich to Mark Van Doren concerning the filming of *Black Angel*. This was kindly reproduced for me by Mike Nevins.
21. For a description of the films and their flaws see Francis M. Nevins Jr., "Fade to Black," *The Armchair Detective* 20.1 (1987): pp. 39-51; "Fade to Black, Part Two," *The Armchair Detective* 20.2 (1987): pp. 160-175.
22. On the significance of Cary Grant in terms of bi-sexuality see Andrew Britton, "Cary Grant: Comedy and Male Desire," *CineAction!* 7 (December 1986): pp. 36-52.
23. Studlar, "Masochism," p. 268.
24. See Francis M. Nevins Jr., "Introduction," Cornell Woolrich, *Black Alibi* (New York: Ballantine 1982), p. xi.
25. See Joel Greenburg, "Writing for the Movies: Barre Lyndon," *Focus on Film* 21 (Summer 1975): p. 48.
26. See Roberta Pearson and Robert Stamm, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," *Enclitic* 7.1 (Spring 1983): pp. 136-45.
27. See Francis M. Nevins, Jr., "Introduction," Cornell Woolrich, *Nightwebs* (New York: Harper and Row 1971).
28. *Phantom Lady*'s chapters are all headed by the number of days or hours preceding Scott Henderson's execution.
29. Cornell Woolrich writing as William Irish, *Waltz into Darkness* (New York: Ballantine 1983): p. 319.
30. Studlar, p. 280.
31. See Studlar, p. 271 for an illuminating parallel to this scene in terms of the masochistic aesthetic.
32. See William Irish, *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* (Philadelphia & New York: Lippincott 1943).
33. For some pertinent observations on the role of the masochistic aesthetic in the Paramount cycle see Florence Jacobowitz, "Power and the Masquerade: *The Devil is a Woman*," *CineAction!* 8 (March 1987): p. 34.
34. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1981): pp. 145-48.
35. The work of Raymond Bellour on classical Hollywood narrative is relevant here. For some qualifications to Studlar's work in terms of arguing for a sado-masochistic dialectic within the viewing subject see Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York: Methuen 1988), pp. 9-13.
36. *Phantom Lady*, p. 110.
37. Studlar, "Visual Pleasure", p. 24, n. 13.
38. Studlar, p. 23.
39. Nevins, "Introduction," *Phantom Lady*, p. xiii.
40. For a significant article on this actor's function in *The Big Sleep* (1946) see Christopher Orr, "The Trouble with Harry: On the Hawks Version of *The Big Sleep*," *Wide Angle* 5.2 (1982): pp. 66-71.
41. *Phantom Lady*, p. 219.
42. On the cultural significance of this transformation in terms of contemporary attacks of modernism see Diane Waldman, "The Childish, The Insane and the Ugly: The Representation of Modern Art in Popular Films and Fiction of the Forties," *Wide Angle* 5.2 (1982): pp. 52-65.
43. *Phantom Lady*, p. 240.
44. The heroine's observations about Marty in *Black Angel* deserve quoting:

Out of the thousands and thousands of fine, constructive women in this world, what evil star made him pick her out? What got him about her? Couldn't he see, couldn't he tell?

And the answer, of course, was self-evident. What gets us about any of them; what gets any of them about any of us? The image in our minds. Not the reality that others see; the image in the mind. Therefore, how could he see, how could he tell, how could he free himself, when the image in his mind all along, and even now, was that of a lovely creature, all sunshine, roses, and honey, a beatific haloed being, a jewel of womankind? Who would even strive to free himself from such a one. Watch out for the image in your mind." [p. 66]

Woolrich's ability to identify himself with both male and female positions receives classic exemplification here.

45. The role of the portrait is a special icon in *film noirs* such as *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Laura* (1945). For some relevant observations on this motif see Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, pp. 47-50. One recalls Keene's fascination with the portrait of the imprisoned Mrs. Paradine in *The Paradine Case* (1947) and the power exerted over Cregar's Cornell by Carole Landis's portrait in *I Wake Up Screaming*. For an interesting discussion of the former film in terms of male impotence and female ambiguity see Michael Anderegg, "Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case* and Filmic Unpleasure," *Cinema Journal* 26.4 (Summer 1987): pp. 49-59.
46. According to Ephraim Katz, *The International Film Encyclopedia* (London: Macmillan 1979, p. 293), he was originally a male model before entering films in 1936.
47. She was a joint discovery of Charles Boyer and Howard Hawks (Katz, p. 944).
48. See Janet Bergstrom, "Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour," *Camera Obscura* 3/4 (1979): p. 88.



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The Man's Melodrama: ***Woman in the Window*** **and** ***Scarlet Street***



Prof. Wanley has a drink with his dream girl.

by Florence Jacobowitz

THE MOTION PICTURES produced in Hollywood during and immediately following the Second World War evoke critical and theoretical responses steadily and magnetically almost a half century later. The concentration of highly creative, turbulent entertainment produced during those years has been attributed to the confluence of a variety of conditions: the ruptures of defined social routines demanded of a country at war and recovering from war, the influx of emigré/refugee artists bringing with them the politicized aesthetics of German theatre, art and cinema as well as an outsider's point of view, the enthusiastic popularization of Freudian theory in America during this period, and the proliferation of genres like the *film noir* and the melodrama, whose narrative and emotional concerns were particularly receptive to the above.

Woman in the Window and *Scarlet Street* are products emerging from this specific crossroads of historical and cultural conditions. They remain valuable in the manner in which Edith Wharton describes significant literature: there is a "vital radiation" beyond art to social experience. They treat "subjects in which some phase of our common plight stands forth dramatically and typically." (Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 27) The comparison of a Wharton novel to these *noir*/melodramas is not as irresponsibly founded as one might think initially. Both ground the individual narrative within the strict confines of a precise social and psychic network which presses oppressively down upon the protagonists. Thomas Elsaesser's description of the characteristics of the melodrama ("Tales of Sound and Fury," *Movies and Methods II*) typifies a diverse cross-section of American art:

... alienation is recognized as a basic condition, fate is secularised into the prison of social conformity and psychological neurosis, and the linear trajectory of self-fulfillment so potent in American ideology is twisted into the downward spiral of a self-destructive urge seemingly possessing a whole social class. (p. 188)

The efficacy of these cultural works

depends upon the participating adult reader/spectator who has enough awareness and experience to realize these parallels profoundly.

This theoretical premise, of the awake and participating spectator, underpins the following discussion. These works of art foreground and *place* the narrative's relationship to social determinants through various stylistic strategies. *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* specifically rely upon narrative devices such as irony, humour, parody, excessive heightened modes of dramatization, as well as the performances of their principal stars, to produce a qualified engagement with the protagonists and the unfolding story. The audience is privileged to various levels of awareness and a kind of multiple layering is achieved whereby the spectator can profoundly feel for and identify with a protagonist's predicament or the conditions within which she/he finds her/himself or the tone and the atmosphere underlying those conditions, but can see beyond the characters' limited points-of-view to the social contradictions which oppress their desires.

A critical analysis can highlight these strategies or illuminate a particular reading from a different historical position, but the 'text' is not meaningless without the theorists' key to the dream-work. The audience's pleasure derived from these films is dependent upon the activity of spectating. Fritz Lang, Joan Bennett and Walter Wagner, the principals behind Diana Productions whose first film release was *Scarlet Street*, were not unaware of this. Their goal was to produce films for a mature, adult audience. Lang considered *Scarlet Street*, surely one of the most extravagantly stylized films of the period, to be "a realistic film of the people and for the people." The minutes of a publicity meeting for Diana Productions confirms and elaborates on this: "Mr. Lang believes his direction reflects this respect for audiences, for he depends on audience collaboration to a very large extent to give full meaning to his work." (Bernstein, Mathew, "Fritz Lang Incorporated," *The Velvet Light Trap* 22, 1986, p. 37), Lang specified that 'audience collaboration' includes "judgments film viewers make about characters and about the consistency and reli-

ability of narration in his films." The respect for an intelligent discerning spectator is not only evident in the planning but is relied upon in the process of meaning production and worked in as a structuring principle. The films invite and depend upon this participation.

One cannot ignore totally authorial intention in Lang's case (even in the post-Barthesian era of the death-of-the-author) or discount the profound influence of Brechtian dramatic theory in his work. (Lang had collaborated with Brecht on the script of *Hangmen Also Die* two years prior to the making of *Woman in the Window*.) Perhaps what is most conveniently forgotten of Brecht's theories was his commitment to social reality. "The task of the artist is to render reality to men in a form they can master" (Harvey, Sylvia, "Whose Brecht? Memories For the Eighties," *Screen*, Vol. 23 1, May-June 1982, p. 50). As Sylvia Harvey notes, for Brecht, the term realism involved questions of epistemology beyond questions of style; there is "a tripartite relationship between textual properties, contemporary social reality and historically formed readers" (p. 51). Brecht's work was also deeply committed to pleasure and entertainment, utilizing popular forms of dramatic art. Hollywood products are clearly limited in the degree that they advocate a transformation of social reality, but they can make ideologically familiar notions of gender and one's identity within the family and/or workplace strange and foreboding, linking the curtailment of human potential and vitality to socially prescribed demands of normative masculinity and femininity in an inequitable class-structured society. (Although neither film makes any direct reference to notions of class consciousness, they certainly evidence an awareness of hierarchical social strata wherein power and domination are linked to money and the male sex.) Both films' political significance lies in their ability to situate the individual crisis within social terms, without relinquishing the pleasures of the audiences familiar with the conventions of popular cinema.

If the melodrama can be described (as Andrew Britton has) as the genre where-in compulsory heterosexuality is pres-

ented as a nightmare, one might describe *film noir* as the genre wherein compulsory *masculinity* is presented as a nightmare, and, in this and other senses, the genres are not as far apart as is often suggested. In fact, both share the overriding principle of constriction and entrapment as a defining motif, whether it be within the family or within patriarchal social organizations and demands of gender ideals. The anxiety which *film noir* desperately tries to lay to rest revolves around the male protagonist's crisis of identity and fears of not living up to the responsibilities of domination, power and achievement so central to masculinity. The fears realized in the *femme fatale* are often symptomatic of the 'hero's' doubts and fears of his own feminized inadequacies. Masochistic tendencies of punishment and self-denial significantly cross both genres; at times the violence is directed inwardly and is expressed emotionally as in melodrama or outwardly and physically as in the *noir* or gangster films. Masochism is not specific to a particular sex, just as the containment which so vividly characterizes the melodrama is not specific to women uniquely.

Woman in the Window introduces the central protagonist through the motif of confinement in the workplace, in the family and in a leisure/social setting — the masculine world of the club. The opening long shot of Professor Wanley/Edward G. Robinson with horizontal bars of light and shadow cast across his face, shows him lecturing on the psychological aspects of homicide. He explains how injunctions against murder demand qualification as there are various degrees of culpability. "The man who kills in self-defense should not be judged by the same standards as the man who kills for gain." The film immediately links the professor with entrapment and the potential to kill. The following scene at the train station introduces Richard Wanley in his role of husband and father within another context of confinement. His wife comments on her fears of her husband's being "cooped up" after he mentions that he will be having dinner at the club. Wanley's remarks to his wife of being sorry that he cannot join her and their two children on the vacation, and his exaggerated declaration that he will miss them "every minute of the day and every second of the night" is heavily undermined by his cheery monotone, the lack of contact emotional, erotic or otherwise between any members of the family, and his farewell to his children, "Goodbye to you little (b)rats," which ironically links them to the enemies of

the gangster, Little Caesar, associated with Edward G. Robinson. The gangster connotations associated with this star are crucial to the casting of Robinson as Prof. Wanley (and Chris Cross in *Scarlet Street*). The masculine potency and physical violence attributed to this genre seems antithetical to his casting as the soft-spoken, emasculated Chris Cross and the associate professor. His stature and mannerisms in Lang's films connote an almost child-like naiveté and gentleness, precisely those characteristics repressed in the masculine gangster world. In both *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*, Robinson's characters feel uncomfortable and displaced in the male world in which they move. As in the melodrama, both characters share a limited access to money and hence power, both yearn for a release through romance or creative expression, both suffer a 'mid-life' crisis which activates their desires.

Elsaesser describes a form of the melodrama which, on the surface, seems to characterize both films. He calls them melodramas in the *série noire* tradition:

where the hero is egged on or blackmailed by the *femme fatale* . . . into a course of action which pushes him further and further in one direction, opening a narrowing wedge of equally ineluctable consequences, that usually lead the hero to wishing his own death as the ultimate act of liberation, but where the mechanism of fate at least allows him to express his existential revolt in strong and strongly anti-social behaviour. (p. 177)

Both *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* have been discussed in this way (see E. Ann Kaplan's collection: *Women in Film Noir*). In the absence of the family or in response to the suffocating presence of the oppressive castrating wife (both equally devoid of sexuality), the protagonist meets up with the embodiment of his repressed desires in the form of Joan Bennett. She promises her illicit forthright sexuality in typical *femme fatale* tradition, but delivers a nightmare of murder, blackmail and deceit. The hero is destroyed, losing his respectability, his social position, his money, his dream girl. Both male protagonists move towards a release through suicide, though Prof. Wanley is saved by the deus-ex-machina dream ending which abruptly reburies the overwhelming anxiety and frustration which have been unwillingly dredged up (much like George Bailey's rebirth at the end of *It's A Wonderful Life*). The problem with simplifying either film, particularly *Woman in the Window*, in this way, is that the dangerous Other in Prof.

Wanley's safe armchair-existence (like Donnelly in *The Reckless Moment*), is the only empathetic character who cares for the protagonist and is finally the only one in whom the protagonist can confide. The intruder's significance to the central protagonist in these films extends beyond the sexual — answering needs and listening to admissions which cannot be voiced legitimately elsewhere. The real threat in both *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* is the male system enshrined in the Burghers' club led by the supreme figures of patriarchal law — the District Attorney, Frank Lalor/Raymond Massey and the physician, Dr. Michael Barkstane, the male who regulates the body, holding the power of life and death (who supplies the medication that will kill Wanley). The emphasis on the men's club as the arena where the masochistic wish-fulfillment fantasy is played out is critical, as it supplies a frame of reference, a setting for the nightmare as well as a cast of characters. Chris Cross's adventure is similarly framed by another private boys' club — the dinner party J.J. Hogarth hosts for his employees. The men envy and admire the masculine ideal J.J. embodies. His 'freedom' and 'power' (like Elster's in *Vertigo*) act as a catalyst, setting off Chris's dreams and desires.

The masculine system of competition, power and domination linked to money and social privilege brackets both narratives. The critical shot introducing Wanley's fascination with the portrait of the woman in the window connects his desire to his two friends; Lang cuts from Wanley looking, to the two men at the left of the composition watching Wanley looking, followed by the camera panning back to Wanley. "Flirting with our sweetheart? Our dream girl? We've decided she's our dream girl, just from that picture. . . We saw her first. . . " A layering of the narrative is immediately produced. The spectator sees that Wanley's responses and actions are always monitored and judged against the demands of masculine Law. This is made evident in the conversation that follows in the club. The men ask Wanley if he is planning to take advantage of his freedom as a summer bachelor by going to the Stork Club or taking in a burlesque show. What follows is a treatise on middle-aged death-in-life wherein Wanley complains of feeling the end of "the brightness of life." (A sentiment shared by Cliff Groves/Fred McMurray in the male melodrama *There's Always Tomorrow*.) There is great pathos in his painful admission of life ending at 40. "I hate

that stodginess and solidity . . . I'm beginning to feel the end of spirit and adventure . . ." The DA immediately warns of the consequences for middle-aged men "who act like colts . . . I'm not joking when I tell you that I've seen genuine tragedy issuing out of pure carelessness, out of mere trifles; a casual impulse, one drink too many, idle flirtation . . ." The system of censorship is firmly in place, enacted by the DA, the watchdog for the law he defends. "Do you think it's quite safe to leave me alone in this rebellious state of mind?" Wanley asks. The super-ego/Father answers him as one would a child, "You'll be alright — just run along to bed like a good fellow." Wanley internalizes this repression as is evidenced in his complaint, "The flesh is still strong but the spirit grows weaker . . . Even if the spirit of adventure should rise up before me and beckon — even in the form of that alluring young woman in the window next door . . . All I might do is clutch my coat a little tighter, mutter something idiotic and run like the devil."

The introduction of the Joan Bennett character, to both Wanley and Chris Cross, is the summoning forth of rebellion, the release of the desire to recapture 'the brightness of life,' the 'spirit' and 'adventure' extinguished by the demands of gender and emphasized through the passing of time. The evidence of the woman in the window's existence as the embodiment of a wish fulfillment is made clear in the way she appears — her face is imaged over the portrait — in her over-stated attire (the sequined/feathered hat, the cigarette, the sheer chiffon dress which suggests her nudity), and in her over-determined slow-paced speech: " . . . Can I help you? I'm not married, I have no designs on you and one drink is all I care for . . . Is that right?" Wanley's desire is closely related to the masculine response without which it has no meaning, "I'm thinking of their faces tomorrow when I tell them about this . . ."

Wanley's evening remains devoid of any expression of sexuality. It is the little things he was warned against — lingering over the extra drink — the "mere trifles" which initiate a chain of events. Wanley's seemingly innocent "rebellious state" manifests its darker, more desperate side in the repeated stabbings of Frank Howard/Claude Mazard, the boyfriend who suddenly appears and claims ownership, paralleling and echoing the earlier moments ("flirting with our dream girl? . . . We saw her first"). The narrative rolls along an erratic path of emotional/dream logic. Mazard's

murder is abrupt and sudden, a violent and extreme response to a stereotypical situation, as is common in the melodrama.

Just as in dreams certain gestures and incidents mean something by their structure and sequence, rather than by what they literally represent, the melodrama often works by a displaced emphasis, by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections. In dreams one tends to 'use' as dream material, incidents and circumstances from one's waking experience during the previous day in order to 'code' them, while nevertheless keeping a kind of emotional logic going, and even condensing their images into what, during the dream at least, seems an inevitable sequence. Melodramas often use middle-class American society, its iconography and the family experience in just this way as their manifest 'material' but 'displace' it into quite different patterns, juxtaposing stereotyped situations in strange configurations, provoking clashes and ruptures which not only open up new associations, but also redistribute the emotional energies which suspense and tensions have accumulated, in disturbingly different directions. (Elsaesser p. 180)

The murder of Mazard is the coded murder of the father and the Law of the father epitomized by the DA. His stature and importance become evident when the DA divulges that Mazard is a powerful industrialist whose disappearance alone will incite severe economic repercussions. When attempting to calm Alice and justify the murder as self-defense, Wanley claims coolly and without regret, "I have no feeling about him . . . He was trying to kill me, there's no question about that. If I hadn't of killed him he would've killed me. If you hadn't given me the scissors I'd be dead," and proceeds to try and usurp the role of the masculine authority figure who is methodical and in control. Later in the film when Wanley is on his way to revisit the scene of the crime, he comments, "This is quite an adventure for me." Wanley's 'adventure' is not in the promise of eroticism but in the challenge in assuming a position for which he has little experience. (The irony of the restrictions imposed by this overly regulated system is evident in the sign located near the site where Mazard's body was dumped: "No parking, no picnicking, no bicycles, no walking. . .")

One can encapsulate succinctly the entire film in the words of the DA, in the scene in the club when he invites Wanley to accompany him to the woods where Mazard's body was discovered by

a patriotic boy scout: "We'll show you how the law operates to nail a man." Nail him, in fact to his coffin. Prof. Wanley's feeble attempts to cover up the murder and get rid of the body, followed by his inability to conceal the endless trail of clues implicating him in the crime, place him in a position, as the DA says, continually to "account for yourself." The movement of the narrative towards Wanley's increasing self-implication is played out against the subtle rituals of the club, which are precise and complex. Who pays for dinner, where coffee and brandy are served, codes of dress and appropriate protocol are examples of a highly codified and regimented system where the rules are absolute. The DA's position in the legal world awards him the privilege of gaining access to confidential disclosures concerning the crime which he then uses to regale his buddies in the club. Wanley's perpetration of the crime ironically gives him the same powerful knowledge as the DA. Unconsciously at least, the murder becomes another adventure which Wanley can't wait to divulge to his friends. At one point the DA 'jokingly' accuses Wanley of being eaten up with envy: "You see my name on the front page of every newspaper so you make a desperate attempt to elbow in my case by claiming guilt," correctly placing the crime within the masculine world of competition, success and performance.

Alice Reed, who begins her existence as a conjured up ghost of desire, manages to become a character as the film progresses (evidenced by the change from glamorous costume to everyday clothes) owing to Joan Bennett's performance and to the role Alice plays in Wanley's life. She is a helpful controlled partner — the only moments in the story where believability is strained are those where Alice is supposedly hysterical. To suggest that the image of femininity is safe when locked within a frame and threatening when let loose, does not apply convincingly to the film. Alice willingly carries out Wanley's plans and instructions and props up his new-found importance. He is happy to hear from her when she calls, "I'm rather glad that I've heard from you . . ." (she is the only friend who congratulates him on his promotion) and never blames her for having held back his pen or for her unsuccessful attempt to kill the blackmailer. ("You're very fair, Alice . . . quite generous.") The DA's suspicions that the man and woman who performed the crime live hating and fearing each other, worrying who will 'blab' first, is the only supposi-



Woman in the Window: After the murder.

tion which is entirely incorrect: Alice is the only one Wanley trusts and confides in.

In fact, Alice is more a mirror image (and the proliferation of mirrors in the *mise-en-scène* in her apartment confirms this; in one shot Alice and Wanley are paralleled in mirror reflections on either side of Alice's fireplace — they are also of the same height) than a feared Other, and represents an inversion of the classic notion of the *femme fatale*. She is a projection of what Wanley wishes for himself (youth, spirit, adventure). Alice is youthful, independent (her apartment is more luxurious than the Professor's) and is associated with creativity (the artist's drawings), glamour and 'class'. One can argue that the blackmailing episodes, apparently beyond Wanley's consciousness, are still 'dreamt' by him as he and Alice are identified and similarly aligned. The blackmailer's links to the DA and the powerful masculinist Law of the Father are evidenced in his final lines to Alice, "How could you lie to Pappy like that?"

How did you think you could get away with it? . . . since you've been such a smart doublecrosser I'll let you dig up some more dough for Pappy . . ."

Although Alice is sympathetic and more of a double to Prof. Wanley, she does not represent a woman's voice or position. Bennett breathes life and a certain autonomy into Alice but Alice remains a dream symbol — a collection of accumulated emotional energies redistributed and projected on to a character. She remains a portrait briefly animated and laid to rest with the central protagonist.

The expressionist *Weltanschauung* within which the Langian nightmare operates is not life-affirming or rebellious in any positive way. Wanley doesn't want to overthrow the system, he wants to fit in and play a more active role, but his frustration is finally overwhelming. Wanley's wishes which first lead him to a murder in self-defense and then to a failed attempt to plan and knowingly kill, exhaust him. The film indicts a world where death seems pref-

erable to life, and again veers into the melodrama. All of Wanley's attempts outwardly to express his frustrations in the social world (even if contained safely within the dream form) ultimately turn inward. As in the melodrama, illness becomes a metaphor for the internal implosion taking place. Wanley manifests a variety of symptoms of his illness from stomach upsets, poison ivy, infected cuts, tension headaches, feeling faint in the country, mopping his brow and taking refuge in the car (a classically female position) to finally killing himself by simulating a heart attack (the solution to many a heroine's unanswerable agony in life).

Scarlet Street can be paired with *Woman in the Window* in the way it articulates a similar thematic: compulsory masculinity is a nightmare which can be best escaped through death; however, the excess which thoroughly permeates and characterizes this vision produces a significantly different product, demanding a different kind of participation and response from the



Scarlet Street: The split perspective. Chris fantasizes romance, we see the prostitute.

audience.

Scarlet Street, like many of the Dietrich/Sternberg collaborations, defies the simplistic theorizations of the spectator's response to Realistic art (the magical powers of the mesmerizing sutured narrative, the notion of identification — and now over-identification — as being and becoming the protagonists, the over-riding principle of manipulation and spectator passivity etc.) in its reliance on overstatement, performance, excess, irony and parody. Although far less outrageously celebrational than any Sternberg work, *Scarlet Street* communicates in a manner significantly different from the dream-like atmosphere of *Woman in the Window*, manifesting a sensibility in certain ways comparable to what Susan Sontag termed 'camp' (Sontag, Susan, "Notes on Camp," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*). This does not undercut the film's 'seriousness' in articulating a breakdown resulting from the strains of gender demands. The camp-like sensibility of *Scarlet Street* is established in its detached cynical humour, heavily

ironic tone, and layering of perspective. One of my favourite moments which illustrates this tone and the spectator's 'distance' from the narrative is achieved in a scene in Kitty's apartment. Chris is "tormenting" Kitty, suspecting her of having had another lover who might have been Johnny. Kitty responds by storming to her bedroom and slamming the door. As she changes to go out, she worries about alienating Chris and insists that he remain and paint. Chris tries to reconcile with her, asking her to marry him, suggesting vaguely that something might happen to his wife, and finally asks to paint her portrait. Kitty answers with the comment, "I was gonna do it myself, but . . . paint me Chris," and places her foot regally in Chris's lap as she hands him the nail polish. Chris kneels down and begins painting; Lang cuts to a closeup of Kitty looking down on Chris as she says, "They'll be masterpieces." The scene defies a close reading but elucidates perfectly this sensibility in operation.

The camp elements of the film — the aesthetic emphasis on artifice, styliza-

tion and all that is not natural — are crucial to its meaning. The metaphor of acting and deception, 'being-as-playing-a-role,' highlights the unnaturalness of gender roles and of behaviour as social construction. However psychologically motivated, the protagonist's actions are informed by social demands and Chris's adventure, like that of Prof. Wanley, is precisely situated within a hierarchical masculine system of power and exploitation. Neither protagonist ever achieves the awareness of this. As in the melodrama, the audience is privileged to a perspective and a context which the characters lack. Chris's big problem (one which he shares with all the main characters) is, precisely, his lack of perspective — "One thing I never could master . . ." This layering of perspective and the disjuncture between audience and character point-of-view is established right at the beginning and structures each scene. Although Chris is introduced as an empathetic character, achieved through his position of being the benign victim/underdog, one's identification with the character is called

into question because he quickly becomes an active participant in the system of exploitation in which *all* the characters participate (this reaches its crowning moment in the flashlight signal Chris gives Homer to assure him that the coast is clear: a double cross). The spectator is implicated in this system to the degree that one's cultural conditioning establishes a bias for Chris against Kitty; the film exposes one's willingness to forgive Chris in the scene where J.J. abruptly forgives Chris's theft without any explanation with his one line, "Chris, it was a woman, wasn't it? I thought so . . ." In fact, the film has meticulously established otherwise, placing Chris's fall within his struggle to be a 'real' man like J.J. or Johnny.

Scarlet Street obsessively connects the power and freedom and all the seductive possibilities open to a man like J.J., to the notion of time and aging, and the combination of the two acts as a catalyst for releasing Chris's desire. The 'idea' of Kitty, like that of Alice Reed, is born on the night of the dinner party when J.J.'s mistress in the film's opening shots is discreetly announced by a male butler, which leads J.J. into a rushed presentation of Chris's gift. "I hate to break up a good party, but you can't keep a woman waiting . . . I see you understand . . . Believe me I've had the time of my life tonight . . . and speaking of time . . ." The scene exposes the false conviviality underlying the event (the presentation is hurried) calculated to ensure the devotion and inflate the importance of an objectified worker (a fourteen karat, seventeen jewel cashier) and mystify an employer/employee relationship. The engraving on the watch reads "to my friend Chris Cross, in token of twenty-five years of service . . .," as a cashier. (The irony of this is emphasized in later shots of Chris in his cage-like cashier booth, and in Kitty's surprise when learning that Chris is a painter: "To think I took you for a cashier!") J.J. is clearly an ideal for Chris — the camera privileges J.J. in the opening shots over the back of Chris's head — and J.J.'s desired effect is achieved and painfully evidenced in Chris's modest, stammering remark, ". . . All I can say is, we've got the best boss in New York." J.J.'s ability to buy services and loyalty is displaced as 'generosity.' He imposes one of his specially made-up cigars on Chris, who accepts while objecting "I, I, don't usually . . ." (the gesture is repeated later when J.J. buys off the police with a box of his cigars) and announces that "everything is charged to J.J." (He also challenges Chris's superstition of being

the third on a match: Chris denies his belief while the camera privileges the audience to a closeup of Chris's crossed fingers.) As J.J. exits his employees comment on what a 'great guy' he is and then rush over to the window to watch him, admiring and envious of the 'dame' with whom he departs. Chris and his fellow employee, Charlie, are set apart from the group and slip out at this point. Although Chris has been the focus of attention and has received a gold watch for his efforts, J.J.'s successes in the masculine world expose his misery and alienation: "I feel kind of lonely tonight." Chris mistakes J.J.'s

social privilege of buying and owning his mistress for a romantic notion of love, just as the employees attribute their devotion to their boss to his being a 'great guy'. Chris's naive comments, "Do you suppose J.J. is running around? . . . I wonder what it's like to be loved by a young girl like that . . .," are not shared by the spectator, who is aware that the 'young girl' is an object bought like the cigars. (The opening scene's strains of the romantic 'Santa Lucia' act as ironic counterpoint.) Chris compares himself and his diminished position to J.J.'s — he admits he has never been loved like that, even as a

Scarlet Street: Lazy Legs and Johnny.



young man. "We have dreams when we're young which never pan out . . . I dreamt I was a great painter . . . I'm a cashier." The notion of lost time, mis-used time, 'killing time,' and the burden of leisure time, which allows one time to reflect, is raised when Charlie comments that he hates Sundays, "I never know what to do with myself." Chris's dreams and his submerged identity as a painter are regulated by his one leisure day a week and are confined to the washroom (and even that is soon threatened by his wife's promise to give his paintings to the junk man). The scene outlines the characters' feelings of loss and profound social alienation with great pathos. Chris's sense of his inadequacies measured against an established system of masculinity parallels that of Prof. Wanley. The latter's recognition that time has passed him by and that "life ends at forty" leads him to sublimate his sexuality through the reading of the poetically erotic "Song of Songs" and dream up an adventure that will allow him entry into the masculine world of 'spirit and adventure.' Chris's meeting Kitty after wandering around lost in the Village (a place associated with his youthful dream of being an artist) is comparable to Wanley's meeting his 'dream girl' but is heavily tinged with an irony lacking in the former film. The audience sees Kitty for what she is — a prostitute wrapped in plastic so that her wares can be displayed, being beaten by a customer or a pimp. Chris's misreading (he has 'saved' and met a 'young girl' who might love him as J.J.'s girl loves him) continues the strategy of a split perspective established in the opening sequence.

Chris's attraction to Kitty is to the image he constructs for himself, one which she willingly reflects back to him. He sees in her the opportunity to be desired, to regain lost time and again be young, and to be acknowledged as the painter he has always wished he was. Chris's fears of being too old emerge in his opening conversation with Kitty, "Since I'm old enough to be you father . . ." which she senses and wisely allays: "You're not so old — you're mature . . ." The next day Chris happily reports to his friend, "I haven't been to bed . . . I'm not as old as I thought." When Chris again meets Kitty in the café, he tells her, "I feel like a kid myself today," and confesses how "One walks around with everything bottled up." The *mise-en-scène* turns the café into a pastoral, spring-like setting (beginning with a high angle shot through the sun-dappled trees, suggesting Chris's feelings of re-birth). With Kitty Chris can take on the persona of the young artist,

a creative disguise which allows him to be defined outside of his two disempowering roles — his domestic position as the feminized aproned husband/housewife who is not a provider and has no one he cares to possess or provide for, and his alienated position in the workplace, visualized in the literal cage in which he is doomed to count someone else's money while having no access to his own. (This is brilliantly expressed in the scene where Chris is about to steal money from the safe of Hogarth and Company and J.J. approaches with the comment, "Caught you in time. Cash this for me . . . it's personal.") One of Adèle's generally perceptive biting remarks to Chris is that he demand a raise ("Homer made a good salary"). The scene follows the one where Chris has attempted to borrow \$500 legitimately, but, like Mrs. Harper in *The Reckless Moment*, is powerless in the social world where class and ownership, in addition to gender, determine access to money.

Chris's commitment to Kitty is bound, intimately, to his needs and his identity, as much as it is to his being exploited by her and Johnny. The apartment he provides serves as a setting for his new identity, a space where he can both maintain his romance and paint. The scene where Chris agrees to supply the money for Kitty's apartment/his studio follows the one where Adèle threatens to throw out his work. Kitty is aware of Chris's narcissistic motives and clinches the second, larger, sum of \$1,000 by threatening to borrow it from Johnny, "he's got plenty of money . . .," (undermining Chris's image of himself as being the provider for his love object).

The limited awareness Chris does exhibit regards his perception of his marriage as a failure. He tells Charlie openly that he needed a cheap room and "Well . . . you know how these things go . . ." The marriage is defined as being sexless ("I've never seen a woman without clothes on"), and both he and Adèle confess to being stuck (prior to Adèle's departing to listen to the 'Happy Household Hour'). Chris later explains to Kitty that he got married because "I was lonely . . . I couldn't stand my loneliness." In keeping with the style of excess, Chris fantasizes about the possibility of murdering Adèle, identifying with the murderers in the newspaper like the man in Queens who killed his wife. (A version of the male petit-bourgeois' obsession with murder is a major theme in Hitchcock's *Shadow of A Doubt*.) Adèle, clearly picking up the innuendo, quickly counters, "He didn't

get away with it did he? He'll go to the chair, as he should," and Chris admits, disappointed, that a man hasn't got a chance with New York detectives. (Ironically, Adèle's former husband is an ex-detective who gives Chris his chance.) The most obvious display of Chris's desire and potential to kill emasculating women takes place in the scene where Chris, in his apron, is slicing the liver Adèle has asked him to buy. When Adèle asks about his relationship to Miss March, Chris responds by raising the butcher knife, moving towards her menacingly with the offer to help her off with her coat while Adèle backs away, demanding, "Get away with that knife . . . you want to cut my throat." Chris often alludes vaguely to something happening that may free him so that he can marry Kitty, well before the return of Adèle's first husband, Homer.

Thoroughly feminized in his day-to-day identity, Chris releases his repressed potency through his paintings (one of which prominently displays a snake wrapped around a pole under the elevated). Mr. Janeway, the perceptive art critic, expresses his surprise that Kitty has painted these works as they display a strong "masculine force." Chris is also aware of the precise rules of power and privilege governing the art world as he attributes his being a failure as a painter to the fact that had he brought his works to Dellarowe they would never have been accepted. Chris is pleased to have Kitty sign his work because, as he explains, it symbolizes a marriage (one that is more successful than his own) and, as he notes, gives him "a little authority around here." This newly established authority moves Chris to request that he paint Kitty; his desire to paint her reflects his wishes to establish ownership and to confine Kitty within his image of her — one of illicit sexuality, partly uncovered in black lace, and of mother/madonna with exaggeratedly round prominent breasts. (The fantasy is contradicted by Kitty's clothing in these sequences — she is wearing Millie's 'respectable'-looking dress.)

Chris's title for the painting, "Self-portrait," foregrounds an additional meaning which is beyond him. Like the woman in the window, Kitty is partly a mirror reflection of Chris, sharing with him a number of affinities. (As Janeway notes, "Sometimes it's as if she were two people . . .") Kitty, like Chris, subscribes to a complex system of gender and sex definition and depends upon self-deception to give meaning to an otherwise unfulfilling identity. Both she and Chris envision themselves as creative artists (Kitty's aspirations to being

an actress), however frustrated by their current situations. Both prove to be successful when given the opportunity; Chris's work is lauded and Kitty gives a convincing performance as a painter (Kitty is as complicit as Chris in her fantasy that Chris is a wealthy painter, as he is in believing that she is a young, fresh-faced actress instead of a prostitute). Kitty uses Johnny's over-inflated opinion of himself to define her importance (despite his belittling her and his condescension) just as Chris tries to use Kitty (despite her lack of interest in anything beyond his money). Both Chris and Kitty are imprisoned in romantic notions of *'l'amour fou'*, stuck in the same groove as Kitty's recording of "Melancholy Baby," and both revere the same ideals of masculinity, valuing masculine authority and power as the criteria for a 'real' man. Kitty's masochistic commitment to Johnny is based, in part, on her belief that men stake their territory and express their ownership and control through violence. This ideal is one supported by popular culture and the film alludes to this when Johnny claims he can be an actor in Hollywood easily because he too acts tough and can push girls in the face. Kitty tries to arouse Johnny's jealousy so that he will express his love for her through a claim to ownership when she complains to Johnny of how she dislikes Chris's attempts to kiss her. At least "if he'd be mean or vicious or bawl me out, I'd like him better" (ironically anticipating Chris's final, frenzied, masculine response to her). Although Kitty supports Johnny financially, she buys his potent masculine sexuality in exchange. When Johnny kisses Kitty, she coyly complains "Can't you do better?" to which he retorts "That's all you ever think about, Lazy Legs." "What else is there?" "If you want more heat . . . call the janitor." When Kitty comments, "I don't know why I stay around a guy like you," Johnny remarks pointedly, "You *know* why you do." The scene in the film where their wild love-making is alluded to begins with the camera's slow track over the battle scene, taking in articles of clothing, finally focusing on Johnny filing through Kitty's purse. Chris's attempts at this kind of masculine passionate kissing are met with Kitty's objection, "Chris, you're a cave-man! I like you to like me but there's a limit!"

Both Kitty and Chris inadvertently validate their low self-esteem by remaining with partners who exacerbate their deficiencies. Johnny, like Adèle, constantly demeans Kitty's creativity ("You've no imagination"), impor-

tance ("You've always wanted to be an actress, now's your chance"), and intelligence ("I'm gonna make a monkey out of you"). Like Chris, Kitty deceives herself by legitimizing her relationship with Johnny through the guise of 'true love' ("I'm in love . . . crazy in love"), exemplified in her exchange with Millie: "You wouldn't know love if it hit you in the face." "If that's where it hits you, you oughta know"; and reassures herself by calling Johnny her 'fiancé' and reminding him to buy her a ring with the money she supplies. Although Johnny exploits Kitty's ability to use her sexuality to earn money (through 'johns,' Chris, Janeway or the public who are suddenly interested in her art: as one critic notes, the artist is even more fascinating than her work), Kitty uses Johnny to give her an identity (as Janeway remarks, "Lucky she has you to make up her mind for her").

The scene where Kitty is murdered is significant because it culminates in the moment where both Kitty's and Chris's carefully built deceptions regarding gender roles and identity threaten to be exposed. The scene takes place in Kitty's bedroom with Kitty in bed, and the camera-positioning foregrounds the theme of gender and performance by fragmenting the protagonist's image in the mirrors around her bed. Millie has just called to warn Kitty that Johnny is coming over and has threatened to beat her up. Kitty continues with her self-deceptions of romantic love, commenting, "He can't live without me any more than I can without him . . ." "If you were in love you'd understand . . ." When Chris enters, her disappointment can no longer be concealed and she admits finally, "Can I help it if I'm in love?" Chris denies what he hears, explaining, "It's just an infatuation. He's evil . . . he wouldn't let you alone . . . I wanted to kill him . . ." and ends with his proposal, "Marry me . . . I'm free." Kitty convulses in laughter which Chris misreads persistently as passionate sobs, telling her, "Don't cry, I know how you feel." Kitty's enraged outburst is fuelled by the irony which she cannot acknowledge - here is Chris proposing marriage, when it is Johnny she has wanted all along. In fact, Chris *does* know how she feels in a manner equally beyond his awareness — both he and Kitty masochistically yearn for a reciprocity which is unrealizable, as both use the idea of romance with its masculinist foundation and precepts as a cover for their own alienated, unfulfilled identities. Kitty's final speech unwittingly expresses this, ". . . I don't want to be your wife . . . you idiot!

How could a man be so dumb? I've wanted to laugh in your face ever since I first met you. You're old and ugly and I'm sick, sick, sick . . . Johnny . . . he's a man . . . He'd break every bone in your body . . . *You* want to marry me? . . ." Kitty is 'in love' with Johnny, a real man who could show his love and stake his claim for her by breaking every bone in Chris's body (but ironically always aims for hers). Kitty's final words echo Adèle's pointing out every weakness Chris has painstakingly tried to bury — his physical weakness, his age, his inability to match another man's sexual potency, his not being a real man. Chris's repeated ice-pick stabs (like Prof. Wanley's furious scissor stabs) express a pent-up frustration of never being able to assume the phallus in all of its manifestations, in any social space. Significantly, Chris never perceives his violence as being directed at Kitty: "You were innocent, you were pure, that's what he killed in you, *he's* the murderer." His violence is directed against the embodiment of ideological masculinity — he steals from J.J., 'double crosses' Homer and then frames Johnny, a 'real man' who competitively beats him by possessing Kitty's love. When Chris hears Johnny's haunting whisper, "See Chris, she loves *me*," he shouts back, "That's why you had to die . . . You're the one I killed." Chris is so determined to punish Johnny for revealing his inadequacies that he rides to Sing Sing to witness Johnny's electrocution. There was a scene filmed, cut for fear of its being misread and laughed at, which encapsulates the excess and ironic heights the film relies upon. At Sing Sing Chris climbs a hydro pole so that he can watch the voltage drop and know the moment when Johnny dies. A watchman spots him and shouts, "What are you trying to do, kill yourself?"

Ironically, Chris can't even manage that. Chris never achieves any authority or a respected masculine identity. Chris's trial plays on the believability of his castrated position — both he and Adèle testify to his lack of originality and his inability to paint. Years later Chris cannot confess to his crimes (he is seen as a crazy bum seeking shelter) and cannot even hang himself successfully. Chris is doomed to wander the streets, less eaten with remorse (an excuse expressed in the plot, included to avoid censorship problems arising from the film's allowing a man to get away with murder) than he is haunted by Johnny's supreme claim over Kitty, echoed in her repetitive whisper, "Jeepers, I love you Johnny." Chris never gains insight into



Scarlet Street: The cut sequence; trapped in the masculinist nightmare.

the determinants of his behaviour or his life, but the spectator does. The ultimate moment of irony is achieved at the end of the film, when Chris sees his own "Self-portrait" being carried out of Dellarowe's, but the irony is beyond him. Chris gazes uncomprehendingly while the spectator catches the exchange between the dealer and the buyer. "There goes a masterpiece . . . I hate to part with it." "At \$10,000 I shouldn't think you'd mind." Everyone and everything can be commodified and traded, and the death of the artist only serves to bolster the value of her/his product. The masculinist/capitalist system of power and exploitation is firmly in place, while Chris, its complicit victim, continues, haunted by his own lack.

The final sequence of *Woman in the Window* following Prof. Wanley's re-awakening is a red herring; it is not the

woman who threatens the protagonist, now safely exposed as a 'cheap' prostitute selling herself, but the reflection in the glass. It is the male's ambivalence towards gendered notions of his 'self,' coupled with the petit bourgeois' constricting death-in-life existence that sparks the wish fulfillment fantasies which take on the form and ambience of a nightmare. *Woman in the Window* incorporates the *noir* stylistic tradition of dreamlike chiaroscuro lighting, wet glistening streets, the *femme fatale*'s sophisticated apartment exuding narcissism and sexuality in the multiple mirrors, overstuffed satin pillows and sensuous floral arrangements contrasting the masculine world of the club, but plays upon the melodrama's themes of entrapment and release through illness and death. Contrary to the traditions of the genre, Alice Reed is not a threaten-

ing *femme fatale*: The only glimmer of a positive relationship in the narrative exists between Wanley and his woman in the window. *Scarlet Street* takes on the darker *noir* thematic, using heightened cynicism and irony to depict a social order where every relationship is marked by exploitation and deception so that nothing is redeemable ultimately. Joan Bennett's and Edward G. Robinson's incarnations suffer because they share a marginal position in a social order where the divisions of empowerment are defined precisely. Masculinity is revealed to be a complex gender-class system with intricate laws and demands of who may join and inherit. When the consequences of this unnatural social organization are exposed in all their bitterness, the oppressive blackness of these films becomes uncomfortably clear. □



SEEING BY GLIMPSES FRITZ LANG'S *THE BLUE GARDENIA*

by Douglas Pye

THIS ACCOUNT OF *THE BLUE GARDENIA* is in a sense an extended footnote to George Wilson's analysis of *You Only Live Once*, reprinted as a key chapter in his excellent and timely book, *Narration in Light* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Wilson's essay, first published in 1977 but given an enhanced significance by its context in the book, remains the most stimulating and potentially productive piece of recent Lang criticism in English and it is something of a surprise to find that its insights seem to have gone largely unnoticed in the intervening years.

Wilson analyzes in detail the structural use of what he calls unreliable narration in *You Only Live Once*, views of events which, while drawing on the spectator's conventional trust in what is shown and the tendency to draw conclusions readily from it, expose the hazards potential in such trust. This use of narration is linked in Wilson's argument to other significant patterns in the film, all of which centre on ways of seeing and the difficulty of seeing clearly, patterns which underline the

risks of deception and mistaken judgement at every level from physical appearances to tendencies inherent in specific 'world views.' It is in these ways, he argues, that critique of the characters' ways of seeing is extended to the *spectator's* perception and judgement. If Eddie/Henry Fonda is convicted of murder on flimsy evidence, there is no firmer evidence to convince *us* of his innocence. Our conventional trust in what a film shows us and the powerful drive to believe in and identify with the stars are both potentially undermined.

That potential is only realized, of course, if and when the spectator recognizes the film's strategies: "The film's power cannot be fully felt until the viewer recognizes that the dramas of misperception enacted on the screen have been replicated still one more time in his or her theatre seat. Realizing this, we come to recognize that *You Only Live Once* has a kind of complexity and a kind of insight that we, unsurprisingly, are likely not see" (*Narration in Light* 38).

In the book as a whole Wilson develops several further detailed film analyses and extended theoretical reflections on point of view around these themes of "epistemic authority" and "systematically unreliable" narration. He mounts a fun-

damental challenge to a number of recent totalizing theories of narrative cinema, constructing in effect aspects of a central modernist tradition within 'classical' Hollywood — films which, while remaining within the familiar stylistic and narrative norms and remaining traditionally readable, simultaneously develop critical perspectives on the conventions and their implications.

One of the great strengths of Wilson's account of *You Only Live Once* is that it is based in a concrete sense of the reading process. The spectator is likely to perceive the characters, to draw conclusions about them and their situations in *one* way because the conventions encourage it; to see the other way is made calculatedly difficult. There is a real tension here, a sense of the potentially complex dynamics of the reading process. It is precisely this sense that is missing from the only extended discussions of *The Blue Gardenia* — by E. Ann Kaplan in *Women in Film Noir* (BFI, 1979) and by Stephen Jenkins in *Fritz Lang: the image and the look* (BFI, 1981).

Both Kaplan and Jenkins are concerned with how the film develops perspectives on the place of women within American society: in particular with the production, in a male-dominated society, of images, ways of seeing and of speaking, which attempt to define and place women. For Kaplan the film sets in tension "two modes of articulating a vision of reality" — male and female — and "presents the confusion and alienation of women in a male world . . .," exposing "male assumptions about women in noir films . . ." (83); it "exposes the essential contradiction between the dominant male discourse and the subordinate (repressed) discourse of women in patriarchy." For Jenkins the representation of women is the core of Lang's work. Closely bound up with "the investigation of the female," though, are the ways in which the films render the production of representations, and their relationship to truth, problematic. *The Blue Gardenia* is then treated as one of a number of films whose male protagonists are journalists or writers, "overt producers of discourse," figures who to an extent mirror the role of the filmmaker as producer of the film's discourse. In general, Jenkins concludes: "The naturalisation of mainstream cinema's narrative discourse involves the naturalisation of a seamless system of looking, whereby the gaze of the spectator is smoothly relayed through the gazes of the characters within the diegesis at other characters. The major importance of the Lang-text is that, as a whole, it represents a radical dramatisation of the processes of vision and discourse, and therefore works against this naturalisation" (123).

Jenkins' terms come close to those of Wilson but they are rooted in very different assumptions. Although in the first chapter of *Narration in Light* Wilson argues that the films he is concerned with can be seen as "critiques of ideology" (13), this is not the dominant way in which his arguments are articulated. In fact the predominant terms in which the "dramas of misperception" in *You Only Live Once* are described are personal rather than social or ideological. For example: "All of these relationships are represented as being perpetually threatened by the failure of people bound together by these ties to see and understand the others in a full and satisfactory manner" (37). Jenkins' emphasis, which in this respect seems to me to come closer to the nature of Lang's concerns in many of his Hollywood films, is on the ways in which 'vision' is inseparable from the processes of representation and of communication in a mass society. Hence the constant presence in Lang's movies of photographs and other images; the constant stress on phone calls as narrative devices; ultimately, in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, his last Hollywood movie, the structural use of television.

But where Wilson's model of how the films work on the spectator is dynamic, Jenkins', and to a lesser extent Kaplan's, are inert. In fact strikingly absent from Jenkins' account, given his emphasis on processes and images of representation and by implication, therefore, on the ways in which they may be read (and only residually present in Kaplan's) is reference to the audience, the spectator. In each case the reading process is rendered curiously unproblematic. The force of each, most explicitly in Kaplan's assumption of shared experience ("we identify . . ." etc.), is to erode potential complexity and ambiguity and to suppress consideration of the film's effect.

I will refer to specific examples from *The Blue Gardenia* later but for now one reference to Jenkins' analysis of *You Only Live Once* can indicate the tendency. Like Wilson, Jenkins draws attention to the scene in which the camera moves from a close-up of Eddie's hat, showing his initials, across pictures of his wife, Jo, to a man lying on the bed. The hat and picture on the bedside table lead us to expect Eddie but it is a different man. Jenkins comments: "The text indicates clearly that the filmic discourse's status as representation renders verisimilitude problematic" (90). It seems entirely appropriate, in the context of the whole film, to argue that such textual strategies can function in this way. But it is not obvious that they do so; these meanings are not readily accessible. Jenkins, however, ignored the processes by means of which the spectator negotiates and responds to textual detail. Of course once the strategy has been perceived it is in a sense clear, but as Wilson shows, the film's effect is based on the possible relationship between two sharply contrasting perceptions.

In ways that parallel but do not duplicate *You Only Live Once*, Lang exploits in *The Blue Gardenia* (and even more radically in *Beyond A Reasonable Doubt*.) the potential of film narration to mislead by offering a deliberately partial but apparently conclusive view of events. Powerful conventions encourage us, in the absence of clear indications to the contrary, to accept what we are shown and to draw conclusions from it unproblematically. At the same time the strong ties which bind us affectively to the narrative and the characters tend to discourage (even initially to prevent) reflection on the fallibility of processes of representation which create a fictional world for us. There seems to be, in other words, in some Lang films, a profound play on response, rooted in a potential duality. How unclear the strategies are, how effectively masked by conventional modes of reading and response, is indicated by the critical history of the films. Until comparatively recently no reading of a Lang film in these terms had been published. If that can become one way of suggesting how remarkable the films are in their contexts, one might also consider the extent to which central characteristics of the films themselves encourage a certain critical blindness. I want to argue, on the one hand, that *The Blue Gardenia* develops a deeply critical analysis of the relationship between dominant modes of representation, consciousness and ways of seeing in mid-twentieth century America; but on the other, that this is extended, by means of Lang's play on the spectator's response, to incorporate the film's own means, its narrative and narrational strategies, so that the spectator's perceptions, and some of the conventions which sustain them, are subjected to scrutiny in ways that can have the effect of aligning the spectator with the film's characters. We become aware of the first of these by employing the relatively familiar skills of attentive reading — perceiving, as the film unfolds, developing motifs, potentially significant but unstressed detail in *mise-en-scène*, dialogue and performance. But even at this level the film seems strategically to set

such networks of detail in tension with the dominant armatures of narrative and character which are likely to engage our greatest attention. The powerful conventions of response to movies lull us, as Lang well knows, into sloppy reading. The second is more complex because it requires us to *see* — to become aware of — the processes of narration which movies seem to encourage us to see *through*, and to become conscious of our subjection to those processes. This again involves reading a range of visual cues which invite us (if we are alert) to reflect on the limitations of the views the camera offers us. But equally it depends on conventions of narration common to many crime fictions — in particular on a tension between the open availability of narrative information to the reader and the suppression of crucial facts. The narrative of *The Blue Gardenia* seems fairly open; that is, we appear to have quite free access to events, locations, characters — the narration does not confine us to the movements of a single character. Two characters, Norah and Mayo, are certainly privileged in that they form the major narrative centres, but narration is by no means confined to them or to their viewpoints. Unlike in many *films noirs* and most stories of investigation, we are not even made conscious that there is a narrative enigma. However, presentation of the events leading up to Prebble's murder is not 'open.' The knowledge that the film possesses, that the murderer is Rose, is suppressed, though in such a way as to render it unlikely that we will notice the suppression at the time.

An important difference between *The Blue Gardenia* and *You Only Live Once*, however, is that in the latter there is no moment of revelation when the suppressed information is revealed. In that sense in *The Blue Gardenia* we are offered at least a greater opportunity to reflect back on the film's strategies and on our response. Whether we take the opportunity is another matter.

The opening sequences

IT IS NECESSARY TO DEAL WITH THE OPENING sequences in some detail because they establish at every level crucial contexts for what is to follow. Even so, this analysis is necessarily selective. It will also tend to falsify the film's method by putting emphasis on the significance of details many of which are in context unstressed and which Lang therefore almost encourages us to overlook. As I have suggested, this tension, impossible to retain in analysis, is central to the film.

The opening of *The Blue Gardenia* is as precise and measured as anything in Lang. Though it is less immediately striking than, say, the opening of *Clash By Night*, its concern is equally with the entrapment of characters within social institutions and society-formed modes of perception. Just as Barbara Stanwyck's arrival in *Clash by Night* is tied by means of the editing (movement of the conveyor belt, movement of the train) into the impersonal determining mechanism of the cannery, providing a firm context for her later assertions of freedom, so in *The Blue Gardenia* characters' attitudes are seen to be embedded in and defined by a containing social reality.

The credit sequence, one of the film's few location sequences, establishes the traffic flow and downtown buildings of what seems a representative American city. The setting itself and the light undramatic music suggest ordinariness, the everyday, a suggestion reinforced by the apparently arbitrary singling out of one car in the flow of traffic, and developed later in the presentation of the central female characters and their work and domestic situations as unexceptional, in fact

typical. The opening images intend, it seems clear, to claim representative force for the drama which follows. At the same time, these images introduce principles of narration which will be maintained — our view is wider than and independent of any character — the narration leads us to *view*, to *look at*, the characters, not to look *with* them.

Thus, the film's male protagonist, Casey Mayo/ Richard Conte, the first character introduced, is seen in a close shot at the wheel of his car, his expression suggesting confidence, relaxation and control, but with perhaps a hint of self-satisfaction, the first suggestion of a view of himself and his control of events which will be elaborated and questioned later. Behind him in the back seat of the car, another man is asleep. When Mayo wakes him at their destination, the telephone company building, the second man (Richard Erdman) is shown in close-up with a press camera. The photographer and his camera have minor but significant narrative functions later in the film, but more central for the purposes of this analysis is that the camera is the first of what becomes a set of images of modes of visual representation which, together with the representations themselves, form a complex informing motif. When Mayo enters the lobby he passes, and the camera tracks into and frames in close-up, an advertising photograph of himself — "Daily, in the Chronicle, Casey Mayo . . ." As Mayo walks into the lift in the background of the shot, the camera holds on his photographic image, before dissolving to the next sequence.

We are introduced to Mayo, then, in a context in which we understand that he is a well-known newspaper columnist and that his image of male authority is marketed by means of photographs. We see, that is, both an obviously mediated image — his photograph (framed, static, posed) — and the apparently unmediated view offered us by the film camera. But the potential is already present for us to begin to be aware of that *apparently* unmediated view. The press camera is a minor detail, naturalized by setting, but it introduces, together with the photograph of Mayo, an indication that images are produced, not natural. We too are enmeshed in processes of mediation (we see through the camera's selective eye), though these are less easy to perceive.

The dissolve extends the play with 'images.' We are offered a medium close-up of Crystal/Ann Sothorn, unnaturally still, evidently posing, until the pose is broken by her response to the out of frame question "Age?" and the camera dollies back in two stages to reveal first Mayo, and then Prebble/Raymond Burr with a sketch pad, and a second woman looking over his shoulder at the sketch. The dialogue exchange is lightly flirtatious:

Crystal: Age? Middle of . . . twenties. Nationality Chicago. My phone number is Granite 1466.

Mayo: I'll check with my numerologist before I call.

Prebble: What is it about you newspaper men? I've been trying to get her phone number for a week. You didn't even have to ask.

Mayo: It's all yours — Granite 1466.

A moment later Prebble writes the number on his sketch of Crystal.

The dolly back enacts in microcosm the interplay of partial and more complete perspectives on which, I will argue, the film as a whole rests. It begins in close-up, pulls back with the out of frame dialogue to present a two-shot of Crystal and Mayo, then again to reveal Prebble and to explain, retrospectively, Crystal's pose. In itself the close-up of Crystal is inexplicable — we are not immediately offered the information to give it meaning. In a way that also acts back on the photo-



Prebble's sketch (Crystal and Mayo to the right).

graph of Mayo, the shot emphatically presents images as constructed things, involving a 'freezing' of movement, the adoption of a pose, and the selection of a viewpoint — exclusion as well as inclusion of elements belonging to the represented field. Crucially here Lang links the selectivity of the film camera's view to the image construction in the fictional world.

The context for understanding the specific significance of Prebble's sketch is provided by the shots of the telephone exchange as Mayo is taken on his conducted tour (why he's there is never made clear). The work the girls do is clearly repetitive and dull — in the long-shots of the room they are reduced to more or less anonymous functions at the huge switchboards. Prebble's sketch, however, abstracts Crystal's head from context, leaving the background blank and reducing Crystal to a stereotyped image of working girl beauty which suppresses any social reality. Prebble's job is precisely to construct such advertising images, more of which are later seen in his apartment. Indeed, it is of considerable importance that both men earn their livings by forms of representation and that in the film each produces images of women.

The telephone exchange functions not only as the girl's place of work but potentially as a metaphor for the nature of inter-personal communication within the world of the film. As so often in Lang, phone calls have considerable narrative importance — here as a form of communication which is direct but impersonal, communication without commitment or obligation. Sexual relationships are based on phone calls and the collection of phone numbers is an index of male sexual potency. Prebble has "More numbers than the phone company" and Mayo has his little black book. If the women

are reduced to functions at work and to stereotypes in Prebble's drawings, they are reduced to numbers in the game of sexual exchange initiated in this sequence as Crystal offers Mayo her number and he gives it immediately to Prebble: "It's all yours."

The tone of casual and light-hearted flirtation in this scene's dialogue both denies any seriousness and implies the currency and acceptance of the terms in which the dialogue is conducted — it is playful and apparently harmless. The tone is likely also to disarm the spectator. Yet both the creation of Prebble's images and the game of phone numbers have the effect of treating women as commodities, interchangeable objects for male consumption, and each is acceded to, even encouraged by Crystal. All three major characters — Prebble, Crystal and Mayo — are bound into the complex situation Lang is defining. If Prebble is the more obvious lecher, it is established here and confirmed later, when we see Mayo making *his* phone call in the Blue Gardenia night club as Norah enters to join Prebble, that the two men share the same sexual values and practices.

In terms more specifically of narrative, as well as linking the three characters, we can see in retrospect that this casual exchange also initiates the central and disastrous narrative events. In 'giving' Prebble the phone number Mayo is in effect responsible for Prebble's phone call which will later lead Norah to the Blue Gardenia restaurant. Equally, though, the number is given to Mayo voluntarily by Crystal, Norah's flatmate and best friend. These 'harmless' actions set in train the whole narrative pattern of the movie, a pattern which marks the culpability of the two apparently least likely characters — the male star and the heroine's best friend. It is

not unusual in Lang to find a massive chain of events developed from an apparently insignificant incident, every action proceeding with remorseless logic from the first. But it would be misleading to attach this pattern too readily to the 'fate' that is supposed to dominate Lang's world. Here, as so often in the American films, action has a social context and a moral logic, *all* the characters enmeshed in the defining *ideological* context.

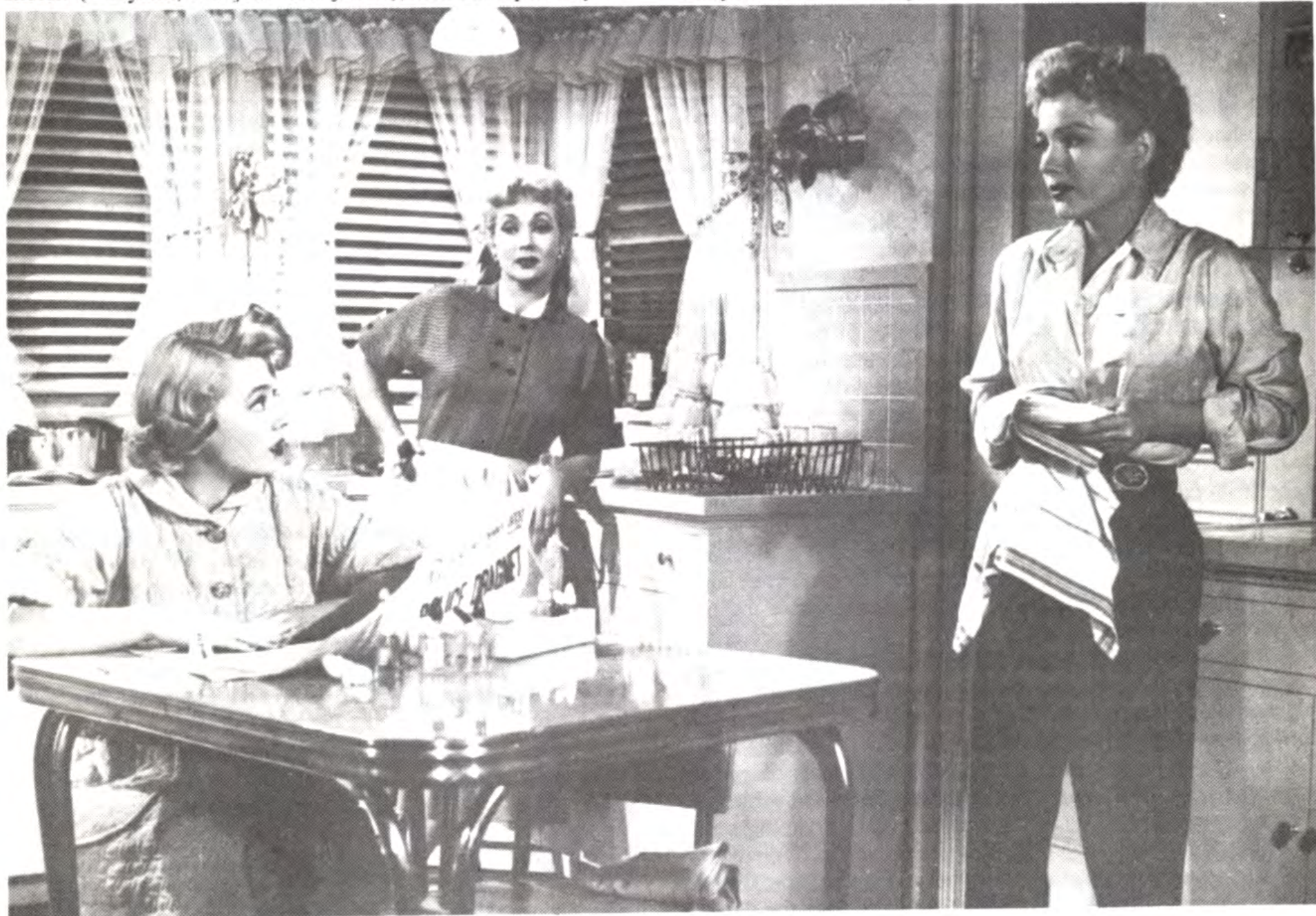
What follows both reinforces and extends this. Perhaps most striking at first viewing is the physical resemblance between the three flat-mates — the other two of whom, Norah/Anne Baxter and Sally/Jeff Donnell are introduced immediately after Mayo's tour of the exchange begins. Facially they are quite distinctive but they are created in ways that suggest, through hair colour and style, make-up and dress, that they aspire to the same fashion ideals. Further details later reinforce the fashion links between the women and generate the sense that they should be seen as different stages of a single development. The women, in other words, model themselves on the kinds of fashion images which Prebble draws — images already established as abstract, static, stereotyped.

But Norah's integration into the defining context is more complex. In the ensuing dialogue her attitude to romance seems to distinguish her from the prevailing casual flirtation in a way that can initially override similarities in appearance. She rejects casual dating because of her fidelity to a boyfriend in Korea — a commitment to traditional notions of one true love, exclusiveness, the ethic of romantic love. Yet it is Norah rather than Sally or Crystal who responds immediately and positively to what she sees as the lifelikeness of Prebble's sketch ("Crystal, it's just like you!"), her susceptibility to

such images significantly juxtaposed with her romantic idealism. Rather than being presented as something apart, untainted by worldliness, romantic love is to be seen as an essential part of the determining ideological context which Lang is dramatising.

What is finally crucial in these opening sequences, therefore, for our understanding of the world the film is creating, is the relationship between the ways in which the characters think and act and the creation of both visual representations and, more broadly, images of gender roles, sexuality and love; a whole ideological complex of images, ways of thinking, forms of action, which reciprocally confirm one another. In different but related ways all the characters are held within this field — their attitudes defined in Lang's extraordinary exposition as culturally determined and, however apparently various, fundamentally linked. The 'success' of the two men with women is associated with their professional skill in the media — Prebble his advertising art work, Mayo his newspaper column. Their treatment of women is held in significant relationship to the images of women they each create. Crystal and Norah are bound to Prebble's images as model and admirer, their apparently divergent attitudes to sexual relationships given a common root by these processes of association and juxtaposition. Sally, the third and youngest of the flatmates, is introduced lost in the world of pulp fiction, oblivious to what is happening around her, but if anything, as Lang later shows, even more mechanically influenced by what she consumes.

The scene that follows, Prebble taking the phone call from Rose/Ruth Storey, further extends these concerns in two ways. It defines Prebble's involvement with women as essentially callous and irresponsible (we read Rose's distress, I take



The women's apartment: Sally, Crystal, Norah.

it, as meaning that she is pregnant) but as inseparable from the values that inform his drawings. Thus while he talks to Rose, he sketches a fashionable woman in a black cocktail dress and smiles at his creation as Lang moves into a close-up of the drawing. Lang then dissolves from the sketch to an almost identical image come to life — Norah in her apartment pirouetting to display her new black taffeta dress to Sally. The link between the two images is emphatically made by Lang's visual narration and may perhaps on the one hand be read as implying proleptically the determining narrative pattern which will contain them both. But the other dimension, equally important in springing the trap on Norah, is less defined by narrative. This further example of the motif of representation enacts with almost mechanical precision the relationship between images and action: a fashion ideal constructed by and attractive to Prebble but, via the dissolve, simultaneously embodied by Norah. It is a deeply unnerving moment, that makes of Norah, momentarily but crucially, almost a puppet.

There is of course another significance in the scene of Rose's phone call — that it introduces Rose herself. By a strong crime fiction convention the introduction of a character in this way is likely to have later significance for the narrative. It could enable us to maintain anticipation of Rose's re-integration into the plot. The effect of the scene is therefore of great importance to one's reading of the film's wider intentions, and it is worth returning at this point to Kaplan and Jenkins who differ significantly in their readings of this scene and therefore of the later murder. Jenkins quotes from and agrees with the *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewer that the killer is so obviously planted that we are in no doubt about the outcome. He takes this as evidence that the film is little concerned with the mechanics of the whodunnit and the revelation of guilt and more with the "specularity of subject/object relations" (115). For Kaplan, "On the evidence we have it seems likely that Norah did kill Prebble in self-defense . . . Because we are seeing from Norah's point of view, we identify with her . . ." The problem here is not in deciding who is right (I happen to think that Kaplan is although Jenkins' conclusions are of considerable interest) but that neither writer sees the issue as a crux in the experience of watching the film. In each argument narrative organization becomes the source of *asserted* effect and hence, most explicitly in Jenkins, of meaning, but the spectator, in whom such effects happen, remains an insignificant term within each reading. Clearly it is impossible to be conclusive about either intention of effect, and empirical evidence is notoriously slippery. But in my experience of teaching the film on and off over about 12 years, it is extremely rare to find anyone who had not completely forgotten about Rose's early appearance by the time she reappears.

At the same time there is very little sense that Lang is interested either in teasing the audience or setting a puzzle to be carefully solved. The film seems substantially designed to allow us no doubt about who killed Prebble. Lotte Eisner provides one piece of circumstantial evidence about Lang's intention. One of the few changes Lang made to the original script involved the presentation of the murder. In the script, we were to have been made aware, as Norah slips into unconsciousness, of a third person in Prebble's apartment. Lang cut this out, ensuring that we largely share Norah's experience and perception of the event. Rather than being nudged into remembering Rose, then, the rhetoric of the film seems designed to encourage us to forget her — even though her appearance is so firmly marked.

The women's apartment

THE SEQUENCES IN THE WOMEN'S APARTMENT elaborate the links between images, belief in romantic love, and the characters' sexuality. If the women's physical similarity points to the models of beauty they share, a pervasive model which extends to Prebble's discarded mistress Rose (it is later suggested that to a Chinese waiter all American girls are beautiful blondes; the women's appearances imply that that is what all American girls are trying to be), these similarities also indicate a less obvious kinship.

I suggested above that the three women might be seen as versions of each other. Though differentiated in their attitudes, they are created as structured by the same ideological set. Most simply and extremely, Sally lives vicariously through an endless succession of pulp murder stories ("Lucky girl, living a life of passion and violence") by Micky Mallett, which effectively dominate her life and structure her view of the world: Prebble becomes 'romantic' once he has been murdered. We are meant, clearly, to find Sally funny but also pathetic, yet in context it becomes difficult to see her sensibility as aberrant; we may come to see the mechanical (and comic) link between her reading and her view of life as only a more obvious version of a predominant condition. Crystal is placed at a different point of what is essentially the same continuum, her capacity for relationships defined by an ideal based on 'romantic' courtship, modified to include a crude form of prick-teasing flirtation. Men are manipulated, kept at a distance, but sexually encouraged at the same time. Her situation is clearly expressed in the relationship with her ex-husband, Homer/Ray Walker, who no longer has "a husband's faults" but now has "a boyfriend's virtues." We may view Crystal, charitably, as a woman who has achieved a certain independence but the nature of her relationships seems extraordinarily stunted: it is as though "a husband's faults" are the inevitable corollary of a permanent sexual relationship. Appropriately it is Crystal who is most devoted to the perfection of her image — her reluctance to allow Homer (her ex-husband!) to see her in her slip, for instance, seems motivated less by prudishness than by vanity.

Norah seems at first the sanest of the three. But the scene of her solitary birthday dinner defines a form of romanticism as extreme and even more morbid. Dominated by the twin ideals of one true love and absolute fidelity, she is committed to a form of stasis in her life which is pointed up by her fiancé's photograph on the dinner table — the worship of an *image* no less partial and misleading than Prebble's sketch of Crystal.

The whole sequence emphatically creates a critical distance on Nora. Almost all the elements of a conventionally romantic *tête-à-tête* dinner (which carry a quite powerful emotional appeal) are created by Norah herself. After her companions leave, Norah in fact constructs her own *mise en scène*, drawing the curtains across the hallway entrance, dimming the lights, lighting the table candles, while the camera follows her in an extended take, 'allowing' her to dictate its movements while holding the spectator at a reflective distance to register the perversity of her romanticism. The women's apartment is consistently constructed to suggest enclosure, a sense underlined here by Norah's actions of self-immurement. The sequence holds in tension Norah's freedom of movement and of action and the constraints, both physical and more importantly ideological, within which she moves.

Norah's solitary dinner also extends the film's concern with representation, the photograph of her smiling fiancé, as

I have suggested, echoing that of Mayo in the foyer and forming part of the set that includes Prebble's sketches. At one level what they have in common is simply their inadequacy to represent the realities to which they refer. But this is a function of perception rather than a quality inherent in images: as the focus of desire or idealization they become almost fetishes (this is clearest in Norah's dinner party) defining what is desirable in static, partial and abstract terms which nevertheless dominate the consciousness of the characters. If one result is the objectification of women, we can associate with this the total failure of sexual relationships within the film, from the grotesquerie of Crystal and Homer, to Prebble and Rose.

Within this context of stifling, even perverse romanticism, Prebble's phone call (he is making use of Crystal's number) coming immediately after Norah has read the letter (in which her smiling fiancé, in Korea, informs her that he has fallen in love with a nurse, his version of romantic love ironically mirroring Norah's own) can seem like fate, part of an external determining pattern which will trap Norah. What seems objectively coincidence and therefore dramatically the embodiment of destiny carries here (as elsewhere in Lang) a quite different logic — a link between a character's state of mind or feeling (sometimes feeling denied or repressed) and the 'objective' world of events. Here Prebble's phone call can be seen as 'called up' by Norah herself, as in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* the world called up standing in precise but almost inverse relationship to the world aspired to. The link between 'worlds' gives narrative expression to the link already established in other ways. At the same time the phone call dramatizes Norah's vulnerability and extends the ramification of her romanticism: accepting Prebble's invitation (originally intended for Crystal) is entirely consistent with the sensibility that organizes the solitary dinner party — a stereotyped response to romantic disillusion.

The murder and its aftermath

THE CRIPPLING LIMITATIONS OF SOCIALLY formed attitudes and the inability to see fully what they imply, provide the context which gives significance to the striking play on audience perception, centering on Prebble's murder and its aftermath. In narrative terms what happens may seem a kind of cheat: the narrative's knowledge that Rose killed Prebble is withheld and we are made to share Norah's belief that she is guilty. The effect is not dissimilar to that of the shooting in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*: for a time we are made to share a belief based on a way of perceiving events that the film as a whole is subjecting to scrutiny. The strategy, strikingly reminiscent within Lang's work of *You Only Live Once* and pointing forward to *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, binds together Norah, the police, Mayo and the audience in a mistaken view of the event. In effect, our tendency to accept the evidence of our eyes is linked to the characters' limitations (which as we have seen are already hinted at before the murder), in a critique of ways of seeing that suggests a questioning of the spectator's tendency to be sucked unresistingly into the narrative.

What we see is partial and designedly misleading. From Norah raising the poker and smashing the mirror to the point at which she leaves Prebble's apartment, our viewpoint is severely restricted. After hitting out at Prebble, Norah faints and Lang uses the familiar optical whirlpool effect to convey her fall into unconsciousness. When she comes round her panic and confusion, compounded by the after-effects of

drink, make plausible her rush from the apartment (she even leaves without her shoes), so that when she wakes next morning she cannot remember what happened but is prepared to believe the worst. In other words, Norah's state of mind leads her to become convinced of her guilt: the evidence, though only circumstantial, seems conclusive. But while Norah's situation is precisely defined and its logic rigorously pursued, our tendency to believe in and sympathize with the star/heroine is exploited as our access to narrative information is carefully restricted. We continue to see more than Norah but the film plays on a willingness to believe with Norah (given that the restrictions of our view are linked to, though not identified with, Norah's subjectivity) in a view of events that seems to accord with what we saw and that identifies Norah as the killer. The foregrounding of this view makes it difficult to perceive the implications of a range of details present in the police reconstruction of the murder and in Lang's visual strategies. Foremost among these is the opening dissolve between two mirror shots, the first Norah's anguished scrutiny of her reflection as she tries to remember the night before; the second a close-up of Prebble's shattered mirror (which we know Norah to have smashed with the poker) that leads into the reconstruction of the crime.

The close up of the shattered mirror which opens the sequence should be, one might think in retrospect, a sufficiently clear metaphor for partial perception: it is offered emphatically enough as a potentially informing image. But because its presence is accounted for by the events of the night before and we are led, as the camera pulls back from the mirror, directly into the cop's convincing reenactment of Norah's struggle, its force is blunted. Point of view is organized, in other words, in such a way that the marking of the mirror will tend to be neutralized by its context. Equally, the cop's apparent confirmation of our sense of how Prebble met his death tends to lead us to overlook several pieces of narrative information which could trouble our sense of what happened: the cleaning woman did not find Prebble's body as she tidied the living-room (where the struggle took place); we see the body in fact being wheeled out of the studio; and Wagner's "Liebestod" is on the record player rather than Nat King Cole singing "Blue Gardenia," the record Prebble played for Norah. Lang balances the construction of the sequence in such a way that we are unlikely to read what is quite evidently there to be seen and heard.

Lang's organization of this sequence clearly has parallels with strategies familiar enough in the crime novel, clues carefully planted but camouflaged by the way the story is told until the revelation of truth at the end reveals their significance. But if it is tempting at first glance to refer what Lang does to such models, such an explanation will not finally do because Lang has not cued us to a possible enigma — or not, at least, in ways that we are likely to recognize. We gain access to the puzzle, therefore, only by countering the powerful pull of the narrative and identification with the heroine and by linking the characters' fallible perception to our own. Such links are there to be made but they require a kind of double vision — look now at the window, now at the view through it — an act of eye-crossing difficulty which (and this is the point) our involvement in the narrative makes very unlikely.

If the shattered mirror points to the possibility of flaws in our way of seeing, it parallels the way in which drawings and photographs are used to point up limitations in the characters' perceptions. Other details in the film lend support to this reading, by offering further indications of partial seeing and giving hints of alternative views: the mirror tilted behind Nat



Norah's 'abandoned' night (with Prebble in front of his easel painting).

King Cole in the restaurant which reflects his hands on the piano keyboard, invisible from the camera's frontal view; and very telling once we note it, the mirror reflecting the backs of the fashionable couple in Prebble's easel painting. More obvious, though hardly less difficult to read at first, is the use of the blind flower-seller in the *Blue Gardenia* whose evidence is important in contributing, by her description of Norah's voice and the sound of her dress ("Taffeta has a voice of its own"), to Mayo's picture of the 'Blue Gardenia girl.' There could hardly be a way of more obviously foregrounding partial perception but, again characteristic of the film's method, the warmth and sincerity of the way the woman is presented leads us not to emphasize her blindness but to admire her remarkable hearing.

These details are likely only to be given significance in retrospect and oddly enough that seems to me further evidence of Lang's play on our perceptions. We have no armature, no perceptual or conceptual grid on which to hang these details as we first move through the film. That is to say that until the revelation of Rose's guilt, Lang holds the spectator in a position that continues to encourage a critical distance on the characters but no ready access to an explanatory view. Although we do not share, and may perceive critically, the characters' particular blindnesses, we remain within the terms that produce Norah's nightmare situation. Lang's narration is partial, but not in itself unreliable — indeed he repeatedly signals the limitations of our knowledge and our view. Held by the seductions of involvement we turn the parts which Lang offers into a misleading whole. We are likely to regard our view of the murder and its aftermath as essentially

transparent because to see it otherwise would be to resist both the process of involvement which is one of our chief pleasures in classical cinema, and the hierarchy of narrative information offered to us.

These tendencies, to build only too readily on insecure foundations, to succumb to seductive rhetoric, to draw on stereotypes and conventional schemata to pigeonhole characters and situation, are what ultimately link us to the ideological entrapment of the film's characters. And although that link remains difficult for us to grasp, Lang presses towards it in the period after the murder by increasingly exposing how closely the systems through which the characters see the world are associated with forms of popular representation.

As Sally is significantly quick to see, what follows Prebble's murder is like something out of a novel by her favourite author, Micky Mallett. And that seems exactly the film's point. The murder is constructed effectively in the Mallett style by the imagination of the characters and by the media. The interpenetration, the reciprocally determining nature of individual consciousness and media process, is implied repeatedly in the film's detail.

In one scene Lang shows us the three flatmates in bed, Sally sleeping with an open Micky Mallett novel on the bed, its title (*My Knife is Bloody*) and cover picture suitably sensational, while Norah listens to the radio beneath her bed covers for news of the murder investigation. It is entirely in line with Norah's distorted vision (in both physical and ideological senses) that she should believe herself a killer: murder is after all the sensationally appropriate end to her abandoned evening. But it is Mayo's reporting and his identification of

the murderer with the girl in the Blue Gardenia - a far from inevitable conjunction - that confirms Norah's sense of guilt and forecloses on any possibility that she might conceive of other scenarios. His 'Blue Gardenia girl' is a creation worthy of Micky Mallett, an image that corresponds to no reality but one that is infinitely more appealing and saleable than the truth: Mayo is flooded with phone calls from women confessing to the murder.

This corrosive view of contemporary America centres on the stock of gender stereotypes which seem universally shared and in particular on the familiar nice/not nice opposition which structures images of women. The assumption made by Mayo and by Crystal is that the Blue Gardenia girl was 'no good' merely because she was with Prebble. Aware of this but knowing that she does not fit that image Norah, in the kitchen discussion with Sally and Crystal, can only counter with the opposite stereotype: "What if she was fighting for her honour?" The film increasingly enforces on us a sense that the ways of seeing the world which these systems create are grotesquely limiting. Mediated powerfully by forms of representation which the film presents as male-controlled, it is nevertheless the case that in this film they entrap both men and women. Much to Lang's credit, I think, the film allows us to see Prebble not simply as a monster who preys on women (though he does) but also as a rather pathetic victim of the system which constructs him. If that seems too charitable a view, consider Mayo, the film's 'hero,' as both victim and villain. I have noted his role in initiating the narrative and the fact that, like Prebble, he possesses an extensive list of women's phone numbers. Mayo's view of women, we discover in the otherwise largely redundant short scene in his apartment with Sleepy, the photographer, polarizes in the familiar way: those who go into the little black book and those who are 'different' and do not. There is a fine irony therefore in Mayo falling for Norah (who is the Blue Gardenia girl though she is not the killer) *because* she does not correspond to his image of what the killer ought to be like, an irony deepened when Norah becomes the victim of his cynical plan to gain the killer's confidence and then turn her in. Although the trap is sprung not by Mayo but by Bill, the barman, it is created impeccably to mark the full extent of Mayo's culpability - but equally perhaps of his entrapment.

It is dispiriting but entirely consistent with the ideological entrapment Lang has dramatized that for the characters no bedrock of authentic perception is revealed even at the end of the film. Norah is freed and the pathetic Rose caught but the processes by means of which this happens are presented in terms which are hardly reassuring. The law is as fallible as in any Lang film - concerned not at all with truth but merely with having "all the evidence we need to convict." And Mayo's solution of the case, far from redeeming him as Ann Kaplan suggests, leaves all the entrapping systems in place. The end by no means "undercuts" "the progressive elements" of the film (Kaplan 89); read as a logical development of what Lang has shown the film's world to be like, beneath the superficial reassurance it is as bleak a 'happy ending' as one can find. All the characters remain trapped within attitudes and practices that the film exposes to us as grotesquely limiting and destructive and they appear to accept their situations complacently. As they emerge from the court the three women pose for photographers, Norah enacting for the press cameras the relief that she is required not simply to feel but to show. Mayo may give up his little black book but it is merely passed on to his photographer, an action that should remind us of Mayo's gift to Prebble of Crystal's number and its consequences; while Norah now plays hard to get, happily

following Crystal's advice on how to get her man. The anticipated coupling of 'hero' and 'heroine' has rarely seemed less promising.

If the characters remain blind and trapped, what of the film's spectator? The chances are, depressingly but understandably enough, that we too will remain largely blind to Lang's strategies. The cultural attitudes we unwittingly inherit and the predominant laziness of our responses to popular movies in particular, mean that we are unlikely to recognize the systematic way in which Lang points to the problems in the characters' perceptions, let alone our own. Lang knows, and the film demonstrates, that in the absence of evident textual marks to the contrary, we will rely on habitual modes of reading and response. In that sense, like so many modernist movies in 'classical' Hollywood, *The Blue Gardenia* seems a kind of stoical endeavour, made knowing that it would not be recognized. But in a curious way, that we should remain blind is also very much Lang's point. Separating ourselves from the affective force of narrative involvement in order to see clearly and think rationally is almost impossible. Our tendency to allow rhetoric to override reason is of course a constant Lang theme. At the same time, though, the moment of revelation in *The Blue Gardenia* is a point which could and perhaps should encourage us to retrace our steps and to reconsider our responses. More overtly than anything in *You Only Live Once*, which in that sense remains a much more closed text, the exposure of Rose is an encouragement at least to see that we have been held within a set of partial but persuasive perspectives. Seeing that, we may come to see *more* - elaborating on repeated viewings the density of Lang's systems. In a way what is involved is a little like the optical illusion which Ernst Gombrich uses (in *Art and Illusion*) to begin to ponder matters of illusion in art — an outline drawing which may appear to be either the head of a duck or of a rabbit. However hard we try we find it all but impossible to see both rabbit and duck simultaneously — the two schemata are mutually exclusive. But we do become aware — and it is a source of both frustration and pleasure — that we are held in a simple but powerful illusion, and we can ponder its mechanisms. Lang offers, as George Wilson puts it in his discussion of *You Only Live Once*, a "simultaneous depiction and demonstration of the fundamental ways in which people fail to grasp the underlying significance of what they see" (*Narration in Light* 37). The depiction is of the characters; the demonstration in *The Blue Gardenia* is that our ways of seeing and interpreting are equally determined by prevailing forms of representation and by the ideological norms they mediate. The formal conventions of narrative film and the expectations they evoke are shown to belong to the same ideological complex that contains the photographs, drawings, paintings and newspapers that surround the characters. □

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The 'ideal' family and the obscene phone call (**The Big Heat**).



RANCHO NOTORIOUS: A Noir Western In Colour

by Robin Wood

IF I BEGIN BY CORRECTING YET ANOTHER misrepresentation of my work, this is not merely for my personal satisfaction: the correction provides a useful and relevant starting-point for some of the things I want to say about *Rancho Notorious*.

In a review of Andrew Britton's *Katharine Hepburn: the Thirties and after* (*Screen*, Sept.-Oct. 1985), Simon Watney remarks:

He accuses [Richard] Dyer, and Robin Wood, of effectively setting up a descriptive theory of discrete genres, as they present themselves, whereas he argues that the differences between genres are far from absolute.

Britton 'accuses' me of no such thing: in fact, precisely the opposite: his reference enlists me on his side in his argument against Richard Dyer. The passage to which he refers (it occurs in an article entitled "Ideology, Genre, Auteur," published in *Film Comment*) runs as follows:

One of the greatest obstacles to any fruitful theory of genre has been the tendency to treat the genres as discrete. An ideological approach might suggest why they can't be, however hard they may appear to try: at best, they represent different strategies for dealing with the same ideological tensions In the classical Hollywood cinema motifs cross repeatedly from genre to genre.

I don't see how I could talk plainer than that. For somebody (like, presumably, Watney) who had not read my article, Britton's reference to it might appear ambiguous. Any ambiguity — the possibility that I might be granted the benefit of any doubt, or that it might be worth at least checking — clearly passed by unheeded, and I am credited within *Screen's* prestigious pages with an opinion that I regard as extremely stupid and which happens to be the precise opposite of the one I put forward. *Screen's* hostility to my work (necessary and justified, up to a point, in the days when the magazine was committed to constructing alternatives to primitive auteurism) remains, apparently, unmodified, and I must not expect any just consideration from its contributors.

The relationship (in many respects a close one) between *Rancho Notorious* (1952) and *The Big Heat* (1953) proves the intricate interrelatedness of the Hollywood genres, a further proof of the foolishness of regarding them as discrete and fully autonomous on the grounds of their defining iconography. It also proves, however, that they are not merely interchangeable, that, for all the overlap of themes, character-relations, ideological structures and demonstrable authorial presence, there remain important distinctions to be made between the two films that are traceable to their generic categories.

First, however, the resemblances. My argument is that (a) in their basic patterns these belong to narrative structures deeply enmeshed in the ideology of western patriarchal capitalist culture, but (b) in their particular inflection within the films, they belong to Lang — the reader is at liberty (is indeed encouraged) to see in this assertion a succinct restatement of auteurist principle.

1. **'Good' woman/'bad' woman.** At the heart of both films is our culture's archetypal, fundamental, binary opposition of women: on the one hand 'good'-chaste-virgin-wife-mother; on the other 'bad'-sexual-immoral-whore: an opposition that, as we know, echoes back through the history of patriarchy, crosses all the Hollywood genres, and founds the structure of literally thousands of our films. *Rancho Notorious* and *The Big Heat* are marked off, however, by a complex of specific inflections:

a. The 'good' woman is violently killed, in an act of extreme brutality, near the beginning of each film. There are differences: Beth/Gloria Henry is the hero's fiancée, Katie/Jocelyn Brando the hero's wife; the former is deliberately raped and murdered, the latter killed by a bomb intended for her husband (and at a point considerably later in the film). But in both cases the death provides the pretext and impetus for the film's major action and the hero's motivation.

b. The 'good' woman is never replaced, neither film moving towards the restoration of the 'good couple'; there is no one with whom the hero can settle down and re-establish the domesticity that was so brutally shattered. Again there is an important difference, the index of the wider differences between the two films: the hero of *The Big Heat* has a young daughter, so that some degree of continuity and domestic stability (however incomplete) is guaranteed.

c. The 'bad' woman moves to the centre of the narrative. At this point it becomes necessary to qualify the term 'bad woman,' which is in certain respects misleading here. Both Altar/Marlene Dietrich and Debbie/Gloria Grahame are involved in criminality (the former centrally, the latter marginally — for her 'complicit' might be a better word than 'involved') but both differ markedly from the archetypal *femme fatale* of *film noir*, an archetype whose range one might define by reference to the Rita Hayworth of *The Lady from Shanghai*, the Joan Bennett of *Scarlet Street* and the

Jane Greer of *Out of the Past*, all three characters being crucially revealed as betrayers, as consistently unreliable and when necessary for their own ends treacherous. Altar shares one major characteristic with the typical *noir* woman: the acquisition (whether attempted or realized, but in either case central to her motivation) of power in the form of money. Debbie does not even have that, being a mere 'kept woman' with no more power than a plaything and little apparent desire for it (beyond a pleasure in expensive clothes and other gifts).

d. In the course of the film, each woman falls (genuinely) in love with the hero, commits herself to him, and is morally redeemed by this. The 'redemption' is, as we shall see, not without its bitter irony, and its function is not to convert her into her opposite, the 'good' woman, or make her a possible marriage partner for the hero. We might say that she reverses the typical trajectory of the *noir* woman but is cruelly subjected to a similar fate. The *noir* woman initially commits herself to the male protagonist, but this proves to be ambiguous (in *Scarlet Street*, not even that): she is constantly ready to manipulate and betray him, and her death is a punishment for her duplicity. Altar and Debbie begin in the criminal world, gradually learn to commit themselves to the male protagonists (whom they perceive as figures of a superior morality and purity), and their deaths are the direct consequence of that commitment.

e. The woman's commitment to the hero necessitates that she disengage herself from a prior relationship with another man, a representative of the criminal world which, for the hero's sake, she has decided to repudiate. Again, the difference between the films is as important as the parallel. Frenchy/Mel Ferrer is genuinely in love with Altar, indulges in wild romantic gestures for her sake (risking his life to get her perfume), and is accorded the status of the romantic outlaw-hero (though this, like every other apparent 'positive' presented within the film, is rigorously undercut). Altar's commitment to the hero, then, links her again to the *noir* woman as it is experienced as a sort of betrayal, though a very different sort as it is not motivated by the desire for power/money (rather the reverse — Altar will lose her status and prestige by leaving the gang). Vince/Lee Marvin, on the other hand, is a brutal, violent psychopath with no redeeming features whatever, and Debbie is not so much 'betraying' him as getting her just revenge for her disfigurement at his hands.

2. **The revenge hero.** 'Hate, murder and revenge' — the refrain of the "Ballad of Chuck-a-Luck" that runs through *Rancho Notorious* as Brechtian commentary — has been taken as a kind of motto for Lang's work; certainly, it points to a preoccupation that recurs throughout it, from *Kriemhild's Revenge* (1924) to *Das Tiger von Eschnapur* (1959) and seems particularly prominent in the American period (e.g. besides the two films discussed here, *Fury*, *The Return of Frank James*, *Scarlet Street*, *Man Hunt*, and even *The Blue Gardenia* in which, while revenge is not the central concern, it turns out to be the motivation for the murder in the culminating revelation). The theme and its most obvious message (that revenge, however apparently justified by moral outrage, eventually destroys the soul of the avenger) is by no means unique to Lang: the western offers dozens of examples (*Winchester 73*, *The Searchers*, *Nevada Smith* . . .), and there are many more within *film noir*, the gangster genre, and the 'ultra-violence' horror film (*Witchfinder General*, *Last House on the Left*). One specifically Langian inflection is suggested immediately by the ballad itself: its association of 'Hate, murder and revenge' with 'the gambler's wheel,' 'the Wheel

of Fate.' I shall return to Lang's preoccupation with 'Fate' later. What particularly connects *Rancho Notorious* and *The Big Heat* is the way in which Lang pinpoints the revenge hero's moral decline in his treatment of women: if Lang is one of the cinema's strictest and most uncompromising moralists, the highly idiosyncratic and subversive nature of his moral sense receives here a defining embodiment. Lang was able to pursue this theme far more rigorously and unambiguously in *Rancho Notorious* than in *The Big Heat*.

3. **The Gang and the Law.** Law and outlawry are essential components of most westerns and all gangster films. Lang's are not the only films that place the hero in an ambiguous position between them (or against both), but the narrative strategy is central to the projects of both films. The difference here is crucial: Vern/Arthur Kennedy never aligns himself with the Law; Bannion/Glenn Ford is (at the beginning and end of the film, though not throughout its middle) himself, as a policeman, a representative of the Law. Both films, of course, operate within the venerable and still potent (e.g. *Cruising*, *Year of the Dragon*, DePalma's *Scarface*) tradition that presents the Law and outlawry in terms of either interchangeability, complicity, or both.

* * *

IT IS EXPEDIENT AT THIS POINT TO RETURN TO my opening remarks about genre. *Rancho Notorious* and *The Big Heat* share the same structure; the differences between them largely are dependent on the genres to which they belong. 'Dependent on' rather than 'determined by': it is necessary to insist on the distinction, in these days when the author is denied not only intention but intelligence, reduced to (Stephen Heath's phrase) "an effect of the text." The genres may well have a determining influence on the work of commercial hacks; for an artist like Lang they not so much 'determine' what he does as offer specific possibilities for his use (which of course also implies limitations).

There are numerous period films with *noir* elements (a phenomenon made possible by the ambiguous nature of *film noir*, occupying an indeterminate space between a style and a genre); the typical *film noir* — those fully embodying what we think of as the *noir* world — is strictly contemporary. A Hollywood movie can suggest that certain aspects of contemporary American society are in need of reform; if it wishes to go beyond that and attack its basic structures and premise, it has to proceed with much caution and circumspection, covering itself by means of ambiguity and deviousness. Lang's problem with *The Big Heat* (supposing that at some level, conscious or unconscious, he had the intention of producing a radical critique of patriarchal capitalism — and the prior instance of *Rancho Notorious* seems to confirm that such an intention existed) was compounded by the nature of the material: organized crime vs. the Law, with a policeman as protagonist. A western, on the other hand, is (allowing for the intermittent attempts at 'modern' westerns like *Lonely Are the Brave*) by definition a period film. But it is also, potentially, more than that: despite the costumes, it can become in some hands virtually period-less. I would distinguish roughly here between the historical western and the stylized western — while acknowledging that most examples of the genre contain elements of both. The former (one thinks at once of Ford) is (while not necessarily committed to historical 'fact') deeply involved in a sense of the American past (which may of course be largely mythical). But the genre, as it evolved, developed an iconography and set of conventions and stereotypes that can be used as more or less neutralized

'counters' through which a filmmaker can express a personal thematic that has little or nothing to do with 'period' or 'history.' If *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *Fort Apache* are the closest to 'pure' examples of the former category, *Rancho Notorious* is an unusually pure example of the latter. (Anthony Mann's westerns are perhaps the clearest instance of a 'middle ground' between the two).

Most of us have a general sense of the distinction between 'realism' and 'modernism,' despite the fact that both terms are somewhat slippery and no two critics' definitions of either are likely to be identical. Most would probably agree that one defining component of modernism is stylization. One might describe the classical Hollywood cinema (among the most stylized of all art forms) as a modernist cinema that passes itself off as 'realist' (and fools most of the people most of the time): we have become so acclimatized to the stylization that we don't (or are not supposed to) be aware of it. If we accept Colin McCabe's definition of the 'classical realist text' (which includes everything from Tolstoy to Donald Duck), then *The Big Heat* and *Rancho Notorious* both fall within this elastic category. It seems to me, however, worthwhile to make distinctions, and it seems meaningful to assert that (given the Hollywood film's pervasive modernist/realist dichotomy), *Rancho Notorious* belongs more to modernism and *The Big Heat* more to realism.

I must at once forestall a possible misunderstanding of what is to follow: it may well appear that I am valuing *Rancho Notorious* over *Heat* because (as a — relatively — modernist film) it is the more ideologically pure. I think the last clause is true but the valuation does not follow from it. I see *Rancho* as a Brechtian parable about patriarchal capitalist culture, *Heat* as a complex and contradictory realist/psychological drama with fascinating subversive implications. For me the greater 'purity' of the former is bought at a certain cost, to define which would require words like 'richness' and 'complexity.' I want to make it explicit here, then, that I am not preferring one film over the other, although the primary purpose of this article is to celebrate *Rancho's* remarkable — perhaps unique — achievement. I would add also that I find the more obviously 'modernist' elements of *Rancho* (the painted backdrops, the ballad, the use of deliberately 'corny' images like the fire that blazes up when Altar and Frenchy are reunited) somewhat awkward and uneasy, though they contribute so much to the film's interest: the awkwardness is clearly a product of Hollywood's overall commitment to 'realism,' and the difficulty of incorporating *obtrusively* Brechtian elements in a 'classical realist text.'

* * *

THE DIFFERENCE OF MODE BETWEEN THE two films is analyzable within every aspect of the common structure outlined above. We may begin with the presentation in each of the 'good' woman and the value of domesticity. *Heat*, committed to psychological realism, offers us a series of domestic scenes for husband, wife and daughter. We may find the marital relationship a trifle precious, cozy and superficial, but it is easy (with our conditioning in the conventions of Hollywood representation) to accept it as 'typical,' and sanctioned by the familiar values of American family life. We may also feel invited to perceive (a) the precariousness of this 'perfect' family life, surrounded by the violence and corruption of a very powerful and threatening outside world (the obscenities over the phone by which Mrs. Bannion is so shocked and disturbed), so that domestic security, the sanctity of the home, may come to seem something of an illusion and (b) the ironic reflection of the family



The 'hero' who wants to kill (Jeanette Nolan as Bertha Duncan).

values of the Bannions in the family values of the Laganas (both foreground the devotion of a father to his daughter). But nothing compels us to accept this invitation even if we become aware that the film is offering it.

To move from this back to *Rancho* is to receive an object lesson in Brecht's distinction between representation and presentation, a distinction that might be roughly summed up as that between saying 'This is the way things are' and saying 'Look at the way things are.' The distinction becomes extremely problematic with regard to a stylized/realist medium like the classical Hollywood cinema, where scenes may slip subtly from one to the other and where many moments may operate on a borderline between the two: *The Big Heat* itself would provide many examples, of which I shall cite but one, the close-up of Debbie just before she dies. Her head is cushioned by her mink coat, her right profile presented to the camera, so that the image resembles that of a posed fashion model from a glossy magazine. We know, of course, not only that she is dying, but that the concealed side of her face is hideously disfigured, and the fur coat has been established earlier as the reward for prostitution. The whole notion of 'glamour' is foregrounded and undercut. *Rancho* opens with the close-up of a romantic kiss, without benefit of establishing shots, introduction of characters, or definition of their situation. In the ensuing scene we learn that the couple are engaged but will have to save for eight years before they can afford their ranch. The woman has thought of the perfect name for it: 'Lost Cloud Ranch'; the man responds by pinning on her a somewhat gaudy brooch which he has been

assured comes from 'Paris, France.' If in *Heat* domestic security can be felt to be *represented* as illusion, here it is unambiguously *presented* as illusion. More: the illusoriness not only colours the domestic bliss of the future but the romantic love of the present — a romantic love whose emblems are a lost cloud and a piece of false jewellery, and which can exist and be believed in only outside of any reference to present social reality. (Douglas Pye discusses a similar treatment of romantic love in his article on *The Blue Gardenia*.)

The deaths of the two women in their respective films are perhaps equally devastating (it is crucial to Lang's purpose that our sense of outrage should initially mirror and validate the hero's). But the actual effect and the means by which it is achieved are very different. The death of Katie has behind it our knowledge of the character and a fairly detailed, 'realist' depiction of the marriage which, whatever criticisms of it we may feel to be implied (complacency, conventionality, a slight sense of familial self-congratulation), seems attractive in its stability, in the couple's mutual supportiveness and their open affection, for each other and for the child. The death also has an immediate dramatic context that heightens its shock by contrast: as Katie goes out to start the car, Bannion is telling their daughter her bedtime story ('The three little kittens who lost their mittens'). The scene threatens to become cloying in its sweetness and its sentimental appeal — at which moment comes the explosion that kills and shatters Bannion's domestic security forever.

Given the extreme conventionalization of the character, the brief screen time allotted her, and the drastic undercut-

ting of the ideology of romantic love, Lang has no opportunity (if he had wanted one) of providing Beth's death in *Rancho* with an equivalent context. Instead the sense of outrage is evoked by a single extraordinary image: Beth, kneeling before Kinch and staring up at him with a look of supplication as she holds open the door of the safe. Up to that point, Kinch has been interested only in the availability of money; it is the (completely innocent) suggestion of sexual invitation that immediately precipitates the rape.

The greater ruthlessness of Lang's treatment of the revenge hero in *Rancho* is made possible by two factors, of which genre is prime and casting secondary. Arthur Kennedy never achieved permanent 'star' status, hovering for most of his career somewhere between second male lead and character actor: he could play villains (*The Man from Laramie*) or moral weaklings (*The Lusty Men*) as readily as heroes. Glenn Ford was another matter: his star image was fairly consistently centred on notions of 'niceness,' decency and moral integrity. It is perfectly possible to sit through *The Big Heat* without questioning the hero's actions and motivation. Besides the casting, of course, there is the question of Bannion's relation to the police force and the relation of the police to America's national image. Here, as I suggested earlier, one cannot go too far. The film opts (out) for a liberal-populist compromise: the higher echelons of the police force are corrupt, complicit with 'dirty' capital and criminality, but the 'ordinary guys' (who initially chickened out) come through, and Bannion, forced out of the official Law to 'go it on his own,' is finally exonerated and reinstated.

Far more interesting is what the film does with Bannion as 'revenge hero.' It is important for the film's compromise

position on America that his motivation is ambiguous: quite unlike Vern in *Rancho*, he is introduced at the outset as a disinterested crusader, without personal motivation, determined to contribute to the collapse of organized crime. The personal motivation creeps in with the obscene phone call, and becomes dominant with his wife's death, but the disinterested crusader element is always there: he can remain throughout a 'hero' in the full sense, not just the sense that has become synonymous with 'male protagonist.' But Lang subtly undercuts this. When Debbie, her face disfigured by Vince's boiling coffee, seeks refuge in his hotel room, he explains to her (a) that everything now depends on Bertha Duncan's death (her letter spilling all the dirt is to be opened on her death) and (b) that he cannot possibly shoot her himself (because he still sees himself as a cop, because he has been a good husband and father, because he must remain the hero of the movie, because he is Glenn Ford). He then leaves Debbie a gun with which to defend herself. She takes the hint.

The audience, however, doesn't necessarily have to. If Bannion gives Debbie the gun so that she can shoot Bertha Duncan for him, we must assume that this motivation is unconscious (though perhaps not *too* far beneath the surface). The naive spectator (and the Glenn Ford fan?) need make no connection between the gift of the gun and what Debbie does with it — it is perfectly reasonable for him to leave it with her for her own safety, and the decision and initiative are all hers. But if one reads the film carefully it is clear not only that Debbie risks (and loses) her life for Bannion but that he subtly encourages her to do so (her disfigurement, already, was the direct result of her contact with

The death of Debbie.



him). Her death, from his viewpoint, is more than merely convenient — it is necessary. He can sentimentalize over her as she dies, but (to put it brutally) he won't have to be embarrassed by any expectations she may have formed. The film can then rise to the complex irony of Bannion's (and its own) last line: "Keep the coffee hot."

The stylization and schematization made available by the western permits Lang in *Rancho* to expose nakedly what in *Heat* is covered and rendered ambiguous. From the moment of his discovery of Beth's death and its circumstances, the obsessiveness of Vern's question is underlined, and the film charts his progressive dehumanization. Two factors can be felt to contribute to the intensity of Vern's outrage: the idealized, illusory nature of the relationship (the loss of an illusion is always the most difficult to get over, as the illusion is essentially a part of one's inner self, product of the 'ideal ego'); and the fact, guaranteed by generic convention, that Beth is a virgin (Kinch has had what Vern will never have). If Lang makes it possible to sit through *Heat* without ever questioning Bannion's moral rightness, he begins the process of alienating us from Vern very early in *Rancho*. I am thinking of the scene where Vern forces information from the dying Whitey by withholding water from him. Some might want to justify this in terms of 'seeing things realistically': It is the only recourse Vern has if he is to learn what he needs to know before Whitey dies. But the reason the moment jars so gratingly on most sensibilities has more to do with generic convention than with 'being realistic': this is simply not the way a western hero behaves. Lang underlines the point by having Whitey, after he divulges the name "Chuck-a-Luck," die before Vern can give him the water that might have eased his last moments: the 'hero' is not let off the hook.

But our ultimate revulsion from Vern is provoked by his treatment of Altar. Unlike Bannion with Debbie, it is clear that Vern encourages Altar to fall in love with him, as a means of manipulating and using her. The climactic moment of their relationship, when Altar, in the middle of what she has been led to expect as a tender love scene, inadvertently reveals that Kinch was the rapist/murderer of Vern's fiancée, is marked by one of Lang's bitterest and most disturbing ironies: Vern's gesture in savagely ripping off the brooch (the one from 'Paris, France') from Altar's dress echoes Kinch's violation of Beth. Altar, of course, is not Beth. Neither is she Debbie: there are important distinctions to be made. Beth is 'pure,' Debbie is 'innocent,' Altar is neither. Debbie's innocence is compromised (she might be seen as a midpoint between Beth and Altar): she is the kept woman of a hoodlum. What she is 'innocent' of, in the first part of the film, is moral sense: her moral sense is awakened by Bannion, and the awakening leads first to her disfigurement, finally to her death. If Altar has preserved any innocence whatever, it is a very dubious commodity: she doesn't know how her gang acquire so much cattle and money, what acts they perform to get it, because she *chooses* not to know, insisting that such things are not mentioned within the fences of Chuck-a-Luck. She is also, unlike Debbie, a woman of power, although (because she is a woman) her power is always precarious, its foundation (sexual allure) unstable (she is entering middle age).

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THIS DOES NOT EXHAUST COMPARISONS BETWEEN the two films, but I find it convenient at this point to abandon *systematic* comparison in favour of exploring *Rancho Notorious* from a number of loosely interconnected angles; hopefully, this will illuminate aspects of the

film without seeming to reduce it to a single coherent, 'definitive' reading (such a reading is always a matter of 'seeming').

1. **Lang, Dietrich and Brecht.** One might reasonably claim *Rancho* as the most Brechtian film ever to be made in Hollywood (in some obvious ways and others less obvious but more important). The connection between Lang and Brecht is a matter of fact and well documented: Lang actually brought Brecht to Hollywood to collaborate on *Hangmen Also Die* (with heavily qualified success: all the more extreme Brechtian elements were eliminated from the film). I know of no evidence connecting Dietrich and Brecht, or Brecht and Sternberg (Brecht is not mentioned in *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*), but even if no direct, factual connection exists one can still argue for the Brechtian nature of the Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations. It is quite possible that Sternberg reached a very similar aesthetic by an entirely different route; yet his interest in, and cinematic appropriation of, German culture is well known (it seems to me that the influence of Expressionism on his films has been as exaggerated by critics as the 'influence' — from whatever source — of Brechtian practice has been neglected). As for Dietrich, her artistic development took place within the same environment and period as Brecht's: she was appearing in Berlin cabaret (and in German movies, e.g. *Joyless Street*) prior to Sternberg's 'discovery' of her. A film such as *Blonde Venus* strikes me as exemplary of the possibility of a Brechtian Hollywood cinema: each of the roles through which Dietrich passes, from water-nymph in a 'lesbian' Garden of Eden, through housewife, night-club star, mistress, fugitive mother, prostitute, human icicle, is 'presented' rather than represented, the object being the foregrounding of male construction and the woman's resistance to it. Dietrich's performance style is itself Brechtian: as Marina Vlady tells us at the beginning of *Deux ou Trois Choses que Je Sais d'Elle*, Brecht said that actors should speak as if they were quoting. Hawks and Sternberg have both laid claim to the brilliant inspiration of dressing Dietrich in male attire for her first stage appearance in *Morocco*; but it is on record (there are photographs to prove it) that she was already wearing men's clothes in her cabaret performances prior to *The Blue Angel*. Her appropriation of the signifiers of male domination seems to me to have very little to do with fetishization and everything to do with a Brechtian 'presentation' of the social construction of gender.

I have suggested already that Hollywood 'realism' resists the incorporation of the more obvious — and I think superficial — elements of Brechtian practice. The painted backdrops of *Rancho* (which Lang in any case repudiates, attributing them to budget restrictions) are more distracting than distancing, though the ballad (which almost became a western convention — witness *High Noon*, made later the same year) works well enough, fulfilling its Brechtian function of reducing suspense and emotional involvement and concentrating the spectator's analytical intelligence by telling us what is going to happen in advance of the event. The fundamental Brechtian principles, on the other hand — distancing, the refusal of identification, the encouragement of analysis, the use of interruption and contradiction — are by no means incompatible with classical Hollywood Cinema, of which the developed techniques and conventions offer themselves readily to Brechtian appropriation. I think it can be argued that, with the Sternberg/Dietrich films as forerunner, an ideal of Brechtian cinema came closer to being realized in the Hollywood of the '40s and early '50s than has ever been acknowledged, notably in the work of the European emigrés — Lang, Sirk, Preminger, and even Ophüls. (Whether Brecht would have acknowledged it is another matter.) Many critics have explored this in the melodramas of Sirk, but the rigor-



ous refusal of identification in the *films noirs* of Preminger seems equally relevant here (see Richard Lippe's article on *Angel Face* in this issue for a development of this). Ophuls is a more complicated case, but his characteristic and pervasive irony can associate quite easily with Brechtian principles of presentation and distance. The last scene of *The Reckless Moment* is exemplary: the carefully composed ('staged') family group around the telephone; the son, his resistance to bourgeois cleanliness and decorum vanquished, in an adult-style suit; the daughter inheriting her mother's fur coat (established earlier in the film as the reward for services rendered interchangeably of housewife and prostitute); the camera lowering to frame Mrs. Harper, acquiescing once again in her domestic imprisonment, behind the bars of the banisters.

Distanciation, interruption and the refusal of identification are Lang's guiding principles throughout *Rancho*. Identification with its most obvious magnet, the male protagonist, is, as I have suggested, undermined very early in the film and completely lost as it progresses: by the end, he is probably for most viewers the *least* sympathetic of all the leading characters. Altar is consistently 'presented' throughout: the flashbacks, discontinuous fragments, that recount something of her past, constitute a series of Brechtian 'gests' foregrounding issues of money and gender rather than establishing her as any sort of identification-figure. The film *could* have built Frenchy Fairmont/Mel Ferrer as a romantic outlaw-hero, but conspicuously rejects the possibility: his sense of his age, and fear of his loss of prowess (and of Altar), undercuts the convention of such a character's automatic charisma.

The strategy of distanciation — its means and its function — can be analyzed very precisely in Lang's treatment of Altar's song, "Get away, young man, get away." Distanciation ('alienation,' as Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* has traditionally been rendered — the principle of 'making the familiar strange') is concerned not with the puritanical denial of pleasure (as is often assumed) but with something much more complex: the simultaneous experiencing of pleasure and awareness of it, so that its premises and sources are called into question. The song is clearly there because this is a Dietrich movie and the audience will wish to have her perform. Lang at once permits and frustrates our satisfaction. Dietrich exerts her customary fascination, but any simple, uninterrupted pleasure is heavily qualified: as she sings, Vern recognizes the brooch that was torn from Beth's dress when she was raped and murdered. Lang then gives us a series of quasi point-of-view shots (they are too close to be *literal* POV) as Vern stares at the other men trying to decide (granted his first concrete evidence) which of them is the killer. Pleasure in Dietrich's performance is countered by another form of cinematic pleasure, suspense, the two jarring discordantly. But this second pleasure is also undercut: if we have been sufficiently observant, we (unlike Vern) know that the killer is Kinch. We are forced to share the hysteria of Vern's agonized and penetrating gaze, but cannot identify with it, as we already know what he is trying to find out. The discords on which the sequence is composed jar us into awareness of: (a) Dietrich's status as performer, both diegetically and extra-diegetically the ageing woman continuing to sing erotic and seductive 'numbers' addressing the 'young man'; (b) the obsessiveness of Vern's revenge drive, which we are forced to share (through the POV shots) yet cannot share; and (c) (perhaps) the mechanisms of Hollywood convention itself, through the collision of incompatible conventions.

2. **Dietrich's star image.** Some years ago, in an article on *Blonde Venus* (*Film Comment*, March-April 1978), I suggested that the 'meaning' of Dietrich as star could be summed up in

a question: 'How does a woman assert herself in a male-constructed and male-dominated culture?' The formula is of course too simple, too non-specific: it could apply almost equally to Davis or Crawford, for example. Yet I think it has a special resonance in reference to Dietrich: the Sternberg films, in particular, are more single-mindedly, more explicitly, more consistently, and finally more bitterly (culminating in the heartbreaking alienation of *The Devil Is A Woman*) about that than one can trace through the careers of Crawford or Davis: perhaps because the theme is foregrounded through Dietrich's Brechtian performance-style and Sternberg's Brechtian distanciation.

Lang said of *Rancho*, "It was conceived for Dietrich . . . I wanted to write a picture about an ageing (but still desirable) dance hall girl and an old gun hand, who is not so good on the draw any more. So I constructed this story" (the Bogdanovich interview-book, *Fritz Lang in America*, Praeger, 1969). As a Dietrich vehicle, *Rancho* takes up (again with Brechtian foregrounding — the flashbacks) the theme I have suggested, and proceeds to adapt it to the fact that Dietrich was now 20 years older: Altar has achieved power, in a man's world and on men's terms, in the form of money, through the use of her sexual charisma, but the stability of her situation is becoming increasingly precarious. Lang describes his problems with Dietrich: "Now, Marlene resented going gracefully into a little, tiny bit older category; she became younger and younger until finally it was hopeless." And later: "She was still very much under the influence of Sternberg. She would say, 'Oh, look, Sternberg would have done so and so.' 'Well,' I said, 'but I am Lang.' " It wasn't hopeless: one can watch the battle on the set being fought within the finished film, and Lang won. The more makeup Dietrich applies, the harsher, more unmerciful, and more anti-Sternbergian becomes Lang's lighting, so that one is aware throughout of an ageing woman trying to look much younger than her age, greatly increasing the character's (and the film's) poignancy.

3. **Money, dirt and purity.** Freud, followed by (among others) Norman O. Brown, noted an intimate psychoanalytical association between money (originally gold: see Aesop's fable about the donkey that could shit gold coins) and excrement: money as the 'dirt' of capitalism. Brown cites the phrase "filthy lucre" as an unconscious acknowledgement of the connection. Even more resonant (though more localized, as far as I have been able to determine) seems to be the euphemism employed for the act of shitting in the British middle-class milieu in which I grew up in the '30s: 'Doing one's business' (rather charmingly abridged, within my own family, to the succinct 'biz,' as in 'showbiz'). One may also adduce a familiar and seemingly permanent graffito on a Toronto wall: KAKAPIITALISM. This is why money matters were not discussed in the Victorian home: the 'dirt' of 'business' must not sully the purity of the family. One thinks of Bannion's unsuccessful efforts in *The Big Heat* to preserve his domestic purity from the contamination of organized crime, or of the invasion of blackmail into the Harper household of *The Reckless Moment* (at Christmas-time, no less), as against Mrs. Harper's obsession with cleanliness. The impossibility of purity in a world dominated by money-values is a leading concern of *Rancho Notorious*. At the outset, the realization of the (illusion of) romantic love is shown to be dependent on eight years of saving; and for Kinch, Beth's holding open of the safe door instantly identifies one form of lust with another.

But the theme is developed most extensively through Altar (whose name, in association with her moral situation, inevitably evokes a notion of an artificially constructed, false purity). There is a remarkable juxtaposition of images (one ver-

bal, one visual) in an early flashback, that can stand as another marvellous instance of Brechtian 'presentation': as Frenchy, after their first meeting in the gambling-house, escorts Altar to her hotel, he tells her how he once saw her ride *up* a staircase on a white horse; as he speaks, Altar steps *down* from the boardwalk into ankle-deep mud. Altar's whole life (as I suggested earlier) is built upon a false purity, an attempt to deny contamination: she both knows and doesn't know that her position as owner-manager of Chuck-a-Luck, secret hideaway of a gang of outlaws, involves her in complicity with robbery and murder, and that the money she claims as her cut is as 'dirty' as money can be.

3. Lang and 'Fate'. 'Fate' is taken to be a common theme of Lang's cinema, and what finally links his American films to German Expressionism. The concept of Fate in Expressionist cinema (and in the American *noir* films it influenced) is not monolithic, but it can often appear as a metaphysical principle, a pessimistic apprehension of an inescapable and inexplicable doom before which the protagonist can only prostrate him/herself: from this viewpoint *Nosferatu* is a key text (Murnau's vampire can certainly be explained psychoanalytically but that is another matter). Already in his later German films (*M*, for instance), Fate for Lang is becoming more a matter of social mechanism than of metaphysical principle: the individual is still trapped and ultimately helpless, but the entrapment can be subjected to analysis and explained. If the protagonist is trapped, the spectator is set free: a central principle of Lang's American films, and one that absolutely demands distanciation and the refusal of identification as the prerequisites of its realization. Here, 'Fate' is the end result of a set of interacting social conditions/ideological assumptions and the men whose actions are determined by them (women are, by and large, its victims rather than its agents).

The "Ballad of Chuck-a-Luck," over the opening credits, identifies the 'gambler's wheel' as 'the Wheel of Fate'; Lang comments on this in one of the early flashbacks, when he reveals that the Chuck-a-Luck wheel in the saloon is controlled, not by metaphysical principle, but by the foot of one of the owner's henchmen. 'Fate' in *Rancho Notorious* — the Fate that destroys all the significant characters, without exception — is constructed by the ideological assumptions of patriarchal capitalist society: idealized romantic love, the revenge drive, the greed for money: in short, by the whole dichotomy of illusory purity and dirt that characterizes our culture.

4. Lang as radical moralist. The preceding commentary will have suggested that, if Lang is the Hollywood cinema's most rigorous moralist, the moral system embodied in his work is far removed from that of capitalist orthodoxy. What is ultimately denounced in the films as *immoral* is patriarchal capitalism itself — the 'Fate' that traps and destroys the characters and makes successful human relationships impossible. This must not, however, be seen as offering the characters some kind of general exoneration: Lang's view of Fate, I have argued, is by no means naively deterministic. If his characters are trapped, it is partly by their own actions and their own decisions, and they are viewed as having at least a relative moral responsibility for these.

While never being permitted to become identification-figures, Altar and Debbie become — unarguably, I think — the emotional centres of their respective films. This happens for two reasons: (a) because they are women; (b) because they are morally redeemed by their love for the hero. The former is relatively unproblematic: as women, born into and kept in a subordinate position, we cannot attribute to them the moral responsibility which the men — victims of ideology yet

also its agents — cannot entirely evade. Neither woman is in the least sentimentalized (in particular, Altar's complicity with crime, the fact that she in a sense condones, say, the rape and murder of Beth by refusing to know about such things, is held by Lang in very sharp focus), but the sense that they are more victims than agents (even Altar, with her assumption of power) is never lost sight of. The moral redemption is another matter, the locus of Lang's bitterest irony: in both cases, the woman is morally redeemed by falling in love with a man whom she perceives as her moral superior when in fact he is using her in the most opportunistic manner for his own ends, and in both cases she dies for what is simultaneously her moral salvation and her fatal misunderstanding. The corollary of this is that, as the woman becomes the film's emotional centre, the morally righteous (from the conventional viewpoint) hero becomes its most reprehensible character. Not true, of course, of *The Big Heat*: Bannion, however compromised, retains something of the charisma of the disinterested crusader against organized crime, and while it is possible by the end of *Rancho* to prefer even Kinch to Vern, one can scarcely find Bannion morally inferior to Vince or Lagana. But it is entirely true of Vern, whose treatment of Altar is mercilessly exposed by Lang in all its ugliness. He is even denied the hero's privilege of the generically guaranteed successful showdown with Kinch.

5. The ending. The end of *Rancho Notorious* fully confirms our sense of the film's ruthless, almost schematic logic. An extreme example of closure, certainly (closure has never been so complete), but not the kind to which the Hollywood cinema has accustomed us: no happy ending, no formation or restoration of the heterosexual couple. In fact, no survivors: the mechanisms of 'Fate' that Lang has analyzed culminate in the deaths of all the principal characters. I have found that many people miss this (perhaps because they are reaching for their coats, perhaps because they can't believe their ears), but the final verse of the ballad is quite unambiguous about it: the two men who ride away from Chuck-a-Luck die under a hail of bullets before the day is over.

6. Lang as closet Marxist. Lang's politics, as expressed in the Bogdanovich interview-book, seem to have been, on the level of 'intentional' utterance, hopelessly confused: a melange of vague metaphysical assumptions about 'the human condition' and equally vague 'liberal' sentiments. But 'never trust the artist — trust the tale': the best of his American films come as close to being Marxist deconstructions of capitalism as has ever been possible within the Hollywood cinema. One might point here to Lang's succinct summation of American politics: when Vern first meets Frenchy in jail, the next cell is occupied by the leaders of the Law and Order party, jailed for corruption in the current election and expecting at any moment to be lynched by the opposition. The films cannot of course go further: they cannot propose a Marxist alternative. Lang was blacklisted, but only briefly. The ultimate irony is that, throughout the McCarthy period, he continued steadily to produce movies that are far more devastating and radical critiques of American capitalism than the 'socially conscious' works of the major victims of McCarthyism, and that this went apparently unnoticed despite his known association with Brecht. 'Entertainment' is a wonderful and indispensable cover.

Appendix: Dietrich, Destry and Lang

I HAVE DWELT AT SOME LENGTH ON THE transgeneric parallels between *Rancho Notorious* and *The Big Heat*. It seems fitting also to acknowledge, if more peripherally, the strong transauthorial links between Lang's



'Get away, young man, get away.' (Production still: Dietrich is not wearing the tell-tale brooch.)

western and *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939), the centre of interest being the vicissitudes of the Dietrich persona.

Destry asks to be read as (a) an attempt, strikingly successful, to transform and restructure Dietrich's star image and (b) an interrelated attempt, strikingly *unsuccessful*, to contain and recuperate the transgressiveness that had become a central defining constituent of that image. The reasons for the commercial (and critical) failure of the last three Sternberg/Dietrich films (*Blonde Venus*, *The Scarlet Empress*, *The Devil Is a Woman*) are more complicated than is usually assumed. The favoured account is that audiences were put off by Sternberg's stylistic 'excesses.' On a simple, superficial level this may have been the case, but there are far more cogent reasons which may have operated at less conscious levels (the 'stylistic excess' theory sounds like a 'screen' to conceal, and permit the evasion of, the deeper disturbances the films provoke). For a start, the films are both emotionally and intellectually very demanding, though the demands were consistently ignored by contemporary critics and are of a somewhat unusual nature: the *emotional* response demanded is not the familiar one of gut-wrenching intensity or 'being overwhelmed' (it would be difficult to be moved to tears by *The Devil Is a Woman*); rather, they invite a response peculiar to themselves, in which irony, distance and bitterness play key

roles. The intellectual demands are equally idiosyncratic: rather than signalling that they are dealing with 'profound' or 'difficult' issues of philosophy or metaphysics, they simply force on audiences the frustrating sense of being quite uncertain what they are actually saying and how one should respond (it seems to me that they have only begun to be intelligible since the advent and insights of the feminist movements of the '60s-'70s). There is a greater (inter-related) problem still. The films cannot begin to be understood (or responded to emotionally) until one accepts that the Dietrich character in each is the primary identification-figure, both for Sternberg ("I am Marlene") and for the spectator. (This is not to deny that the male characters function on a secondary level as Sternberg surrogates, as has often been noted: identification in the cinema commonly operates on several, perhaps conflicting, levels simultaneously). It is quite impossible for a 'normal' (i.e. successfully socialized) heterosexual male to make such an identification, which would involve the annihilation of his security, indeed of his very position. It is almost equally difficult for 'normal' women, who would be compelled, at least in imagination, to relinquish the positions assigned them within patriarchy and move out . . . to what, exactly, in the 1930s? That leaves gays and lesbians, who have nothing of consequence to lose (even if they remain afraid of losing it). This, it seems to me, is the real reason why Dietrich

became an icon of the gay subculture, notions of 'camp' being merely a (relatively) positive screen corresponding closely to the 'stylistic excess' screen of antagonistic heterosexuals, a means of evading or defusing the real threat the films pose.

After the collapse of the Sternberg/Dietrich collaboration, Hollywood had on its hands a commodity, still regarded as potentially valuable, that no one knew quite what to do with. Of the various attempts at a solution during the late '30s (prior to *Destry Rides Again*), *Desire* is the most prophetic, the fascinating, ambiguous and much maligned *Garden of Allah* the most interesting. Selznick's film (it belongs very much to its producer) refers us back very pointedly to *Morocco*: again, Dietrich moves out into the Sahara (the 'garden of Allah'), now quite explicitly defined as the site of desire, outside the bounds of Christianity and the Law; this time it is the man (Charles Boyer) who follows *her*; but, as in *Morocco*, the relationship, while mutually desired, is undermined by his inability to free himself from his ideological conditioning. There are important differences: Dietrich, here, is tragically complicit in Boyer's return to Christianity/entrapment, the ending precisely reversing that of Sternberg's film: instead of the woman passing through the gates to move out into the desert, it is the man who moves back from the desert to re-enter the gates of the monastery, and the Law triumphs. The Dietrich character's commitment to Christianity and self-sacrifice (though the film allows us to read it, if we wish, as a tragic error) is the means of mitigating — indeed, virtually annihilating — all the threatening aspects the persona had accumulated through the Sternberg series.

Desire (the same year, 1936, the film that immediately followed the *débâcle* of *The Devil Is a Woman*) initiates what was to become a 'standard operating procedure' for recuperating Dietrich, though *Destry* was to provide its definitive enactment: the corrupt woman is redeemed by falling in love with a good, upright man: a concept totally alien to the Sternberg films and subjected by Lang to the most astringent irony in *Rancho Notorious*. The women of *Destry* conform to the basic archetypal opposition of our culture and of the western genre, the 'good' (future) wife/mother, the 'bad,' sexual saloon entertainer, and the narrative moves inexorably to its predestined conclusion, with Frenchy/Dietrich stopping a bullet for Destry/Jimmy Stewart, leaving him free to form the 'ideal' new heterosexual couple with Irene Harvey. What redeems the project is the opportunity it allows Dietrich of expressing aspects of her personality that the Sternberg films scarcely permitted one to guess at: uninhibited exuberance and energy. The celebration of that exuberance becomes the

film's *raison d'être*, to the point that the narrative has finally to acknowledge its irrepressibility: after Dietrich's obligatory death, the children, led by a juvenile reincarnation of Frenchy, sustain her legend by lustily singing "Little Joe," and the perfunctory union that ends the film is accompanied, not by romantic end-music, but by a boisterous orchestral rendition of "See what the boys in the backroom will have."

Rancho Notorious very knowingly takes over much from *Destry Rides Again*, cluing us in with the name "Frenchy," transposed from Dietrich to the Mel Ferrer character. Even *Rancho*'s saloon horse-race (the men as the horses, the women as their jockeys) is anticipated in the moment when Dietrich leaps on to Destry's back and 'rides' him around the room, after flinging everything in reach at him. Most significantly, however, it takes over the corrupt-woman-redeemed-by-love-for-a-good-man strategy (which, as we have seen, Lang also reworks in *The Big Heat*). *Destry* plays this straight, without irony: Destry is blameless, his moral uprightness never questioned; he never manipulates Frenchy or uses her love for him opportunistically, and he bears no responsibility for her death. Lang undercuts any moral satisfaction we might feel for Altar's redemption by making the object of her love an embittered and brutalized anti-hero who exploits her mercilessly. It is not even clear that she dies heroically trying to save Frenchy from a bullet: we (and Frenchy) have only Vern's word for it: the *mise-en-scène* is ambiguous, and it may be merely the case of one discredited male trying to bolster the ego of another (and by extension his own), a small, precise instance of the kind of ambiguous narration analyzed extensively by Douglas Pye in his article on *The Blue Gardenia*.

Only in the flashbacks does Lang play on Dietrich's *Destry* persona: the exuberance, here, is in the past, and the Altar of Chuck-a-Luck relates more to the Dietrich of the Sternberg films. The Frenchy of *Destry* is *reputed* to be the ruler of Bottleneck, but the film makes clear that her power is quite illusory, always subject to the authority of Kent/Brian Donlevy. Altar, like Sternberg's Catherine the Great, is a woman of *real* power, bought with her sexuality, its effectiveness waning as she ages. □

I wish to acknowledge the influence on this article (and on all my articles nowadays) of Andrew Britton and Richard Lippe. We discuss the cinema together so much that it becomes virtually impossible to separate and specify particular ideas, but it should be understood that everything I now produce is the outcome of collaboration.



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Peckinpah the Radical: *The Wild Bunch* Reconsidered

By Christopher Sharrett

The Hitchcock canonization, coinciding with the rerelease of several of the director's important films, seems to have occurred at a time of interest in a species of auteurism and in the critic's ability to find complexity and contention in directors previously considered passé or mediocre. When examining the hunger of the home video market for new fare, and Hitchcock's already-venerated position as an industry "professional," it is apparent that reappraisals of directors are subject to critical vagaries often not of the greatest integrity. The tendency of such

reappraisals is still to bolster Hollywood's aggrandizement of the author and the mystique of the director, rather than to reconsider a film or set of films with the hindsight afforded by historical perspective and new critical methods. It is not surprising that Hitchcock should be embraced by such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art and the American Film Institute as the film industry seeks legitimacy during a time of marked intellectual bankruptcy. It is even less surprising considering Hitchcock's self-promotion and the collusion of the industry itself in advancing the reputations of directors whose "consistent" themes are noticed by reviewers, regardless of how incidental this consistency may be. While revaluation has done much to enlighten us about innovative and radical aspects of *Vertigo* and *Psycho*, reappraisals, including (especially?) those of academic critics, seem to work hand-in-hand with the general project of hagiography and stimulating consumerism. The situation is most telling when one considers the circumstances which finally allowed for a perception of Hitchcock's major works as radical. While some critics look at *Psycho* simply as a text, an ideological site (there still isn't real consensus here, of course, with critics like Peter Biskind viewing *Psycho* as a right-wing film by a right-wing director), this critical approach began only after Hitchcock had been deemed a serious artist whose works seemed provocative enough to invite the application of psychoanalytic or semiotic theory, and to permit the kind of post-Frankfurt School thinking that would ignore the artist's personal conservatism and the circumstances surrounding the production of his work. The Hitchcock reappraisal informs us of (a) how difficult it is to resurrect directors not seen as legitimate by the industry and by traditional standards of academic criticism and (b) how revaluation of a radical sort still depends in large part on the director's established track record and, perhaps most important, his basic palatability to American liberalism.

Thus, Sam Peckinpah's death in 1984 produced a few retrospectives, but his eulogies tended to describe a director of some promise who failed to attain the stature of a major hero in the industry pantheon. It is not important that *Cross of Iron*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* and *The Killer Elite* are "complex" on issues of sexuality, patriarchy, and capitalism; it is sufficient to know that Peckinpah simply ran out of steam, no longer able to attract an audience, a filmmaker whose breakthrough *The Wild Bunch* gave him temporary celebrity in the media spotlight as Hollywood's master of graphic violence.

The inadequate reappraisal of Peckinpah is representative of the misguided strategies of journalistic criticism. Rather than focus on the innovative themes of his work, the inflections of several genres, and the evidence of progressive ideas

emerging from the restrictions of industry, critics regard Peckinpah as a one-shot artist whose contradictions and incoherent body of work diminish him as a subject for serious consideration. But Peckinpah's contradictions, as much as Hitchcock's, are at the heart of what makes his films important. That he should be able to produce a work of some ideological coherence in his masterpiece, *The Wild Bunch* (1969), is fairly extraordinary given the resistances of his day. At this point I do not wish to feign some deconstructionist conceit about "Peckinpah" being a slate, an intertext where a number of narratives and genre conventions meet. Peckinpah's individual contribution can be appreciated precisely as it is viewed within an historical context, and as the progressive impulses of this director are seen simultaneously with their contradictions and overall circumscription by industry. Also, I want to talk about *The Wild Bunch* as a model of explanation, and certainly not to reinforce arguments of critics who carp about the "unevenness" of Peckinpah. Many of Peckinpah's films of the 1970s contained progressive, even radical themes (and were almost always technically masterful) but for various reasons, ranging from misjudgements on the director's part to a gradual tendency of media reviewers to dismiss Peckinpah for his several repetitive themes, the progressiveness was largely unperceived. Yet there is a great deal about Peckinpah's later work that is interesting and will undoubtedly get fuller treatment. Andrew Britton has written an important piece about the gay subtext of *Cross of Iron*,¹ a film that could stand closer examination with attention to Peckinpah's interest in Brecht. The interconnections of government, business, media, and the military-intelligence apparatus, a favourite theme of horror/science-fiction in the '70s and '80s, keeps recurring in Peckinpah. *The Getaway*, an interesting attempt (damaged by the casting of Ali McGraw) at the crime thriller made popular by Raoul Walsh, is a Vietnam/Watergate era film in its sense of pervasive corruption (the penal system run by the private sector; both men and women portrayed as prostitutes exchanging favours for personal freedom). *The Killer Elite* says much in its title: the CIA is portrayed as a glorified, transnational Murder Inc. employing psychopaths usually associated with the underworld in earlier films. This film and *The Osterman Weekend* (Peckinpah's last and strongest attack on American society in its ornate conspiratorial vision) are noteworthy in their post-Watergate depiction of betrayal, avarice, rivalry, and the demise of any sense of law and democratic principles. One image in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* poetically sums up these concerns: a gangster/executive gets a pedicure from his secretary while reading a *Time* article about Nixon's impeachment. The apocalyptic gun battles which conclude many of Peckinpah's films (and which immediately put off



Crazy Lee (Bo Hopkins) with the hostages.

critics) may be seen as the same expression of rage against the current society represented in the *fantastique* by exploding bodies, reversion to barbarism, or technological Armageddon. *The Wild Bunch* is simply our best model, and one especially useful in that for all its celebrity as a classic Western (and even a "landmark" film in relation to other Peckinpah) its radical content has been ignored.

To be sure, prejudices against Peckinpah are not easily overcome, at least in part because of his public profile and intellectual obsessions. A hard-drinking crusty director in the tradition of Ford and Hawks, Peckinpah entertained the "territorial imperative" and similar determinist theories of Robert Ardrey; embracing such reactionary drivel seemed to supply Peckinpah with a "scientific" rationale not for machismo but for an incipient nihilism. His interest in Hemingway and Ford, individualism and the solidarity of the male group, also did not bode well for any sense of Peckinpah as radical artist. The very interesting writing of Jim Kitses² and Paul Seydor³ helped assure Peckinpah critical respectability, but as late as 1981 a major text on film history contains an entry on *The Wild Bunch* titled simply "Zapping the Cong."⁴ While the directorial innovations of *The Wild Bunch* have been noted in full, it was not until Robin Wood's remark that the film is part of the "apocalyptic phase"⁵ of American filmmaking that we see a different disposition toward the politics of this film, and a tendency to see it in terms other than a vague parable about American intervention in Vietnam. In looking at the complete version of *The*

Wild Bunch it is difficult not to appreciate what an extraordinarily adversarial work it is, savaging the Western genre and the American civilizing experience it has mediated. Brecht and Bunuel (much admired by Peckinpah — Bunuel's *Los Olvidados* was a favourite film) shine through more vividly than Hemingway and Ford, and it was perhaps Peckinpah's downfall that such an amalgamation should present itself unresolved.

Appreciation of the richness of *The Wild Bunch* has been delayed for some very specific and material reasons. First, the marketing of the film by Warner Bros. was callously indifferent, beginning with the studio's cutting of the flashbacks concerning Pike's early life (scenes Peckinpah felt were central to the film), and its double-billing of the film with ostensibly similar adventure fare produced by Warners such as *The Green Berets* and, later, *Dirty Harry*. Second, the film was co-opted in several respects by the hyped *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, a star vehicle for Paul Newman and Robert Redford which contained (but treated with a light touch) the theme of men-with-their-backs-to-the-wall, an idea often spoofed and trivialized which would saturate the genre as it played itself out. Perhaps most important, *The Wild Bunch* could not hold its own against films embraced by the counterculture and recognized as embodying progressive sentiments, e.g., *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Zabriskie Point*, *Easy Rider*. The extreme violence of Peckinpah's film, the presence of such Hollywood mainstays as William Holden, and the very fact that it was a Western excluded it at first both from

commercial success and appraisal as ideologically provocative. Even a cursory review, informed by the critical practice of recent years, reveals how bold the gestures of *The Wild Bunch* actually are.

Peckinpah Personal and Political

IN HIS COMMENTS ON THE FILM IN HIS BOOK *Horizons West*, Jim Kitses remarks, "*The Wild Bunch* is America." The implications of the statement become clear as we understand how interwoven the film's critique of the frontier experience is with its insights into the construction of male personality by American culture. The film begins this examination by the critical approach it takes to the general theme of US adventurism in Mexico, a theme popular in the postwar Western as American interventionism escalated internationally. Films such as *Vera Cruz* or, much later, *The Professionals*, depicted Mexico as idyllic landscape or backdrop to test the mettle of alienated men in disfavour in their own land (an early scene of *The Searchers* contains this idea). Except for those films which use the Mexican Revolution for a mediation on revolutionary change (*Viva Zapata*) or for broader statements about warfare and the male group (*They Came to Cordura*), the attitude of the postwar Western toward Mexico recapitulates notions of the Other from American melodrama. The Hispanic, like the Indian, is alternately demonized and romanticized, with death the "right place to go" (the reference point for all this is the nineteenth-century play *Metamora*). The landscape of Mexico is an Other as it becomes the inverse of a Conradian

jungle: it is a hellish desert where machismo is proven through confrontations with crazed natives (John Wayne's *The Alamo* is archetypal). In *The Wild Bunch* the historical specificity of revolutionary Mexico is understood precisely within the context of assumptions about imperialism seen first in the construction of the male subject, but a conjunction of Self and Other occurs as the plight of Mexico is related to the self-image of the United States, and the personalities of Peckinpah's Hispanics have correlates in his Anglos. It has been suggested by various critics that *The Wild Bunch* is finally about Angel/Jaime Sanchez, the young idealist whose utopian dreams and revolutionary fervor are reclaimed when the Bunch makes its last stand at Aqua Verde. Pike/William Holden sees in Angel his lost youth and a moral code the Bunch has long since scrapped. But this popular interpretation overlooks the film's sense that if such a code ever existed, it was morally bankrupt at its inception. Angel is a revolutionary, but he is also a belligerent sexist; by relating him to the young Pike we see the doomed nature of Angel's dream. Angel's romantic love for Teresa gives him the prerogative to murder her; the youthful Pike causes Aurora's death out of a bravado and arrogance that mask his incompetence. *The Wild Bunch's* parable of America is concerned with the conflict between the romantic and the real, the ideal and the material, a conflict represented in Pike's agony over the public self (the resourceful outlaw) he has fabricated vs. the insecure, blundering man he finally is.

Angel's relationship to Pike is significant, since Angel's capture and persecution reawaken Pike's anguish over lost

The brothel scene.



family and community, a sense of life as it might have been. Yet, although this vision is clearly preferable to the hell represented by Harrigan and Mapache (technocracy, militarism, imperialism), it is not unrelated to the evils of the world. Pike has consistently lived a lie, one that Angel would almost certainly have bought into given his unquestioning allegiance to Pike ("I go with you, *jefe*"). His admiration of Pike (the charismatic male who remains undistorted in the eyes of youth) precludes Angel's beliefs in democracy and community, in the solidarity he supports to the point of sacrificing his life. It is sensible that Peckinpah should show Mapache standing amidst the gunfire during Pancho Villa's assault on the *federales*; Mapache's bravery is reducible here to an absurdly inflated self-image, machismo rampant and ridiculous. Mapache is separated from Pike and Angel by his viciousness, but Peckinpah makes the line deliberately thin. Mapache is also chivalrous, romantic, hot-headed and blundering, the same amalgam we see in Pike and Angel. (Young children are shown admiring Mapache much as Angel and the children of his village admire Pike; Mapache's remarks to the children are as banal and dangerous as Pike's admonishments to Angel.) The lie of the male code informing Pike/Angel and Mapache is revealed in the relationship between Pike and Thornton/Robert Ryan; we can understand their story only in the unedited version of the film, but this two-character construct, basic to Peckinpah's earlier *Ride the High Country* (1961), is absolutely essential to the narrative. In the first flashback, showing Pike's escape from a brothel and his consequent betrayal of Thornton, the film shows that the two men are caretakers of shared memories not easily borne. The flashback occurs just after Pike has bragged to Dutch about his willingness to meet Pershing's army head-on ("I wouldn't have it any other way"). Pike is plagued by the memory of the bordello episode ("Being sure is my business"), giving the lie as it does to Pike's entire life. When the Bunch rides out later in the film to rob the train for Mapache, Pike tells Dutch, "This time we do it right." This line is important since it occurs just after Pike recounts the story of Aurora's murder and the origin of his wounded leg (as Kitses pointed out, Pike's bad leg makes us recognize him as a "crippled man burdened by his past;" the metaphor should be broadened to describe Pike as an archetypal limping hero who prevails, rather pathetically, over a barren land). Pike has never been "sure" about anything, and is not able to "do it right" even when the act is his last chance at personal affirmation. The bordello flashback, shared by Pike and Thornton, is key to understanding the film's conception of the hypocrisy the male lives out. Thornton, sent to prison by his friend's incompetence, continues in his affection and loyalty to Pike. His reduction to bounty hunter forced to pursue his old comrades works principally to shake loose Thornton from the romanticism to which Pike desperately clings. While Pike practically cringes from the bordello memory (he rebounds from the moment of guilt by telling Dutch, "I made him [Harrigan] change his ways"), Thornton bears it stoically, having reconciled for himself the truth about men. The sexual politics are manifest here, since it is clear that the affection men have for each other is consistently translated into violence and bravura acts resulting in betrayal and destruction.

Pike's situation, both tragic and pathetic, is rendered best in the sand dune sequence when Pike mounts his horse after a bad fall on his game leg. In the film's most poignant scene, Pike, now clearly an old man, struggles upright amidst the laughter of the Gorch brothers. Dutch/Ernest Borgnine, his face bathed in the preternatural glow of the setting sun, admires the resolute Pike riding off slowly, hunched over his

horse in agony but determined to prevail. The scene that immediately follows (and effectively undercuts) this brilliant and sensitive sequence is a testimony to Peckinpah's integrity and dialectical sense. Old Sykes rides beside Pike, thanking him for the protection from Tector Gorch, praising Pike for his belief in "sticking together, just like it used to be." At this point Sykes learns that his grandson, Crazy Lee, was killed at Starbuck. Sykes is satisfied to learn that his lunatic grandson "did fine, just fine," but Pike, who only then is aware of Lee's relationship to his old mentor, is momentarily disturbed by the memory of his decision to use the young man as cannon fodder to aid the Bunch's escape. The film does not digress from the idea that Pike is a vicious man for whom "codes" have become abstractions impossible to support. When Thornton claims Pike's gun after the Aqua Verde massacre he is both affirming his affection and conferring forgiveness; Thornton acknowledges Pike's basic morality which had managed to coexist with the crafted image Pike made for himself, and with the cruelty emerging from an attempt to prop up this image.

The West as Wasteland

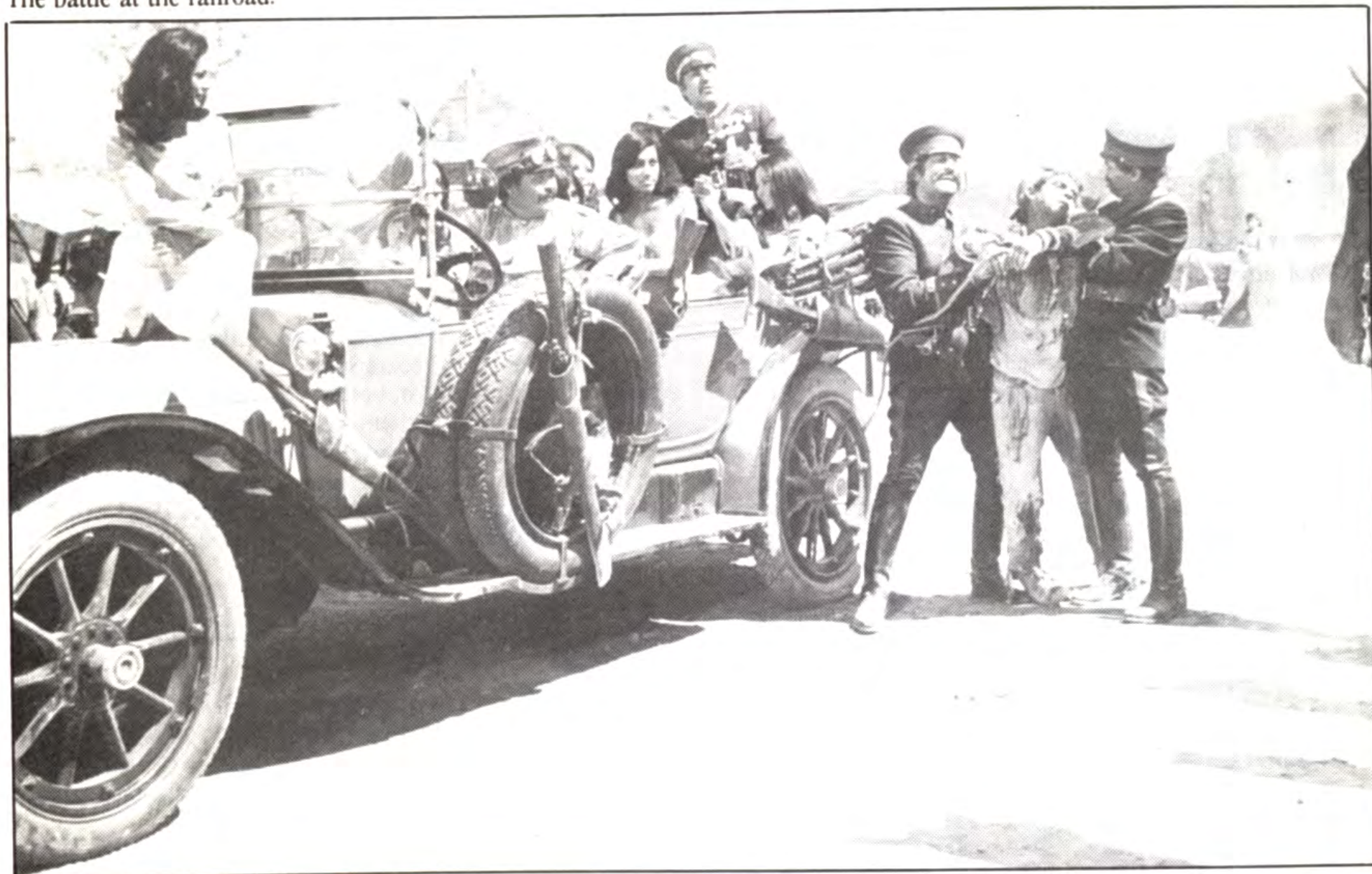
THE WILD BUNCH IS AT LEAST AS FORCEFUL as the Italian Western in debunking the conventions of the genre, and in using thematics to attack fundamental premises of American civilization. Bounty hunters, portrayed as amoral pragmatists by Sergio Leone, are in Peckinpah's film simply vermin, lumpenized elements who function as metaphors for the world of the film. The constant bickering of T.C./L.Q. Jones and Coffey/Strother Martin, their avarice and stupidity ("Don't fire at the army, you idiots!") is emblematic of the internecine warfare, gangsterism, and betrayal apparent everywhere. T.C. and Coffey are the kind of peripheral comic figures who, as in classical theatre, contain in their actions some of the essential points of the narrative. The bounty hunters are associated with predatory birds in several important scenes, particularly the entry into Aqua Verde after the final massacre; we are reminded that Harrigan, Mapache, Pike and Thornton are all predators, and that the victimization of people is central to this story and the frontier experience.

The railroad has long been regarded in the genre as a symbol of the harmful effects of technology on the Virgin Land (the "machine in the garden" idea), represented in such disparate films as *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1967). Peckinpah's film shares with Leone's the idea of the railroad as battering ram for industrial capital. More specifically, *The Wild Bunch* shows the railroad to be the incarnation of everything hypocritical and morally reprehensible about capitalism. Harrigan is more than a railroad executive: he represents the hegemony of capitalism in the affairs of the state. When Wainscoat, Mayor of Starbuck, attacks Harrigan for "using our town as a battlefield," Harrigan retorts, "We represent the law." Indeed, Harrigan *is* the law. The sheriff of Starbuck is barely visible, and the voices of authority among the townsfolk are brushed aside by Harrigan. Frontier justice and the fair play honoured by Ford are reduced here to the extralegal but absolute power of Harrigan, who relies upon mercenaries to capture the Bunch, with the US Army an ancillary weapon of industry; the army's pursuit of the Bunch and Pancho Villa is really about protecting Harrigan's interests. The massacre at Starbuck engineered by Harrigan and the bounty hunters evokes well capitalism's destruction of the society it supposedly sustains.

Organized religion, also a centrepiece of the classic West-



The battle at the railroad.



Angel tortured.

ern, is shown here as an element of the superstructure brushed aside when it interferes, however marginally, with capitalism's interests. Mayor Wainscoat, leader of the temperance rally, is both the chief civic official and the town preacher. The merger of the two roles recapitulates Capt. Rev. Clayton in *The Searchers*, Ford's idealized conjunction of religious and secular authority. In the character of Wainscoat this conjuncture is by no means felicitous since he is incompetent in both roles (Wainscoat had no foreknowledge of the ambush, and leads his prayer meeting straight into the battle). More important, religion is an empty force constantly juxtaposed with the world of men, represented by Harrigan and the Bunch. A discordant version of "Gather at the River" (a favourite Ford theme) is played by the Temperance Union orchestra just before the shooting starts; the song is picked up by Crazy Lee as he murders the railroad depot hostages. Peckinpah is deft in playing with the "Gather at the River" convention as the song annotates the tension rather than the tranquility of the frontier community. The temperance meeting itself is attended for the most part by the very young and the elderly; the congregation stumbles through the temperance pledge Wainscoat recites. We first hear Wainscoat's biblical exhortations ("Do not take wine nor strong drink") as we watch children playing with a nest of ants and scorpions — this violent image/sound configuration is one of Peckinpah's best evocations of Brecht and Bunuel, an horrific depiction of society rending itself to pieces.

The most visceral depiction of the frontier as imperialist adventure appears when the Bunch approaches Angel's village. We see a starving dog amidst crumbling adobe and hear Dutch's remark, "That damn Huerta scraped it [the countryside] clean." Dutch, perhaps more than Angel the conscience of the Bunch, is the key to connecting the personal struggles and contradictions of these aging bandits to the larger problems of the world around them. This is confirmed particularly by Dutch's refusal to enter the brothel in the final scene. He recalls not just Angel's rescue of him during the train robbery, but the rightness of Angel's view of the world.

'The Wild Bunch' and Revolution

WHILE PECKINPAH INSISTED LACONICALLY that his film was about "bad men in changing times," it is clear that *The Wild Bunch* is a meditation not only on the construction of the male by American art but on the nature of evil and the origins of bourgeois notions of the criminal. Here too Peckinpah seems to depend a good deal on Brecht and Bunuel for a sophisticated notion of criminality, since he takes pains to separate the Bunch, finally depicted as noble, from the rest of their world, seen as wholly corrupt. The most telling scene is the early sequence in Aqua Verde when the Bunch, seated at an outdoor cafe, first spot Mapache and his minions. Pike makes a joking comparison between the Bunch and Mapache's army (and Mapache's German advisors). Dutch bristles at the equation, angrily telling Pike, "We don't hang nobody." Through Dutch's insights and Angel's actions, the Bunch (or, rather, Pike) comes to a gradual recognition of a more genuine sense of honour, but is able to claim it too late and for motives not fully resolved. Unlike Brecht's gangsters, Peckinpah's bad men are not simply natural if hyperbolic manifestations of capitalism. Certainly *The Wild Bunch* had learned capitalism's lessons too well, but the Bunch can be associated also with the notion of the criminal as alienated subject dissociated from class origins, taken to anarchist and self-destructive behaviour. Actually, this rather vulgar Marxist approach to criminality seems appropriate to understanding

The Wild Bunch since the film's theme of the search for lost innocence is tied to the search for community and human solidarity. At Angel's village, one of the few idyllic moments of the film, Pike says guardedly to Don Jose, "You know what we are then." Don Jose responds, "Si, the both of you!" Pike, Dutch, and Sykes, now breaking into laughter, retort, "And you!" While Pike expects Angel to forget family, village, Mexico itself (these are all the same in Angel's mind) if he wishes to continue in the Bunch's escapades, the village sequence helps to establish the most significant tension of the film: the need for affirmation of self vs. the need to transform society. The village sequence reminds us that the film is ultimately about Pike, the emblem of American individualism who realizes the bankruptcy of his position too late. The contradictions within Pike form the tense dialectic of the film, one only partially resolved in the shattering conclusion, with the Bunch's return for Angel, the final massacre, Thornton's reunion with Sykes, and the apotheosis of the Bunch. In the brothel scene before the massacre, Pike's moment of grim self-appraisal/revulsion is involved in sentiments concerning Angel's idealism and the plight of the people of Mexico, even as Pike recognizes the young prostitute's moral superiority to him. Pike takes up Angel's battle, but perhaps not for the best reasons.

There is little ideological equivocation, however, in the film's final moments, with the Bunch not only recognized as liberators but with both Thornton and Sykes finally understanding their only sensible place is with the forces of revolutionary change. Their laughter at the conclusion (coinciding with the laughter of the dead members of the Bunch, superimposed on the image, suggesting an acknowledgement and blessing of Thornton and Sykes' decision) is not sardonic or cavalier; it suggests quite simply that the path of the Bunch always led to this moment. The final image, the Bunch's entry into Valhalla (with the strains of "La Golondrina" describing a complete utopian space) is Peckinpah's most romantic gesture, but the contradictions are again poignant and compelling. Pike and the others represent an American idealism long since corrupted, its energies spent, its politics turned into the exaggerated individualism that almost caricatures Social Darwinism. The remaining remnant of American notions of freedom may have some role in effectuating genuine social change, but the amount of waste and savagery represented in the world of *The Wild Bunch* leaves such a possibility in doubt. While the film suggests that revolution is the only avenue to social transformation, such convictions cannot mitigate the jaundiced view of the entire American adventure. For this Peckinpah will probably be regarded chiefly as cynic or nihilist, but the contradictions of his work, particularly as we view them in an era that prefers to ignore contradiction, make his art representative of the national predicament in the second half of this century. *The Wild Bunch* is involved in more than *hommage* for a dead past; it is a recognition of how that past was probably a deceit. □

NOTES

1. Andrew Britton, "Sideshow: Hollywood in Vietnam," *Movie* 27/28, (Winter 1980/Spring 1981), pp. 20-23.
2. Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boeticher, Sam Peckinpah; Studies of Authorship in the Western* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).
3. Paul Seydor, *Peckinpah: The Western Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).
4. David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (N.Y.: Norton, 1981), p. 631.
5. Robin Wood, et al. *The American Nightmare* (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), p. 17.

letters

Response to "Getting a Fix on the '60s: Philip Kaufman's 'The Wanderers' Revisited" and "The Edge" (CineAction! #12)

Dear *CineAction!*

Your Spring 1988 issue on "teen films" raises several interesting points. My commentary on them takes the informal tack of a letter rather than the barbed formality of an article; my letter is exploratory, I hope, in its approach to these issues.

• Susan Morrison's article ("Getting a Fix on the '60s: Philip Kaufman's *The Wanderers* Revisited") overvalues a sloppy but not altogether unpleasant film. George Lucas's *American Graffiti*, whatever else can be said about it (and Morrison, I think, subjects it to reductive caricature), individuates its four male protagonists as Kaufman's film does not; re-viewing *The Wanderers* recently I had trouble simply telling the characters apart (particularly Richie and Perry). Lucas's ability to establish a mood and stick to it, moreover, compares well with Kaufman's cheerful incoherence. The rapid mood-swings characteristic of Kaufman's work have never worked for me as a way of telling a story; when watching a Kaufman film I often find myself wondering "Just what the hell is Kaufman trying to say?" (e.g. the rapid shifts from astronautical celebration to Altmanesque derision and back again in *The Right Stuff*). What is the function, in *The Wanderers*, of the presentation of the Duckie Boys as supernaturally talented (their appearance at the football game) zombies? (A zombiehood that pays homage, I think, not to George Romero but to Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, released the

previous year.) Are they in any sense representatives of social conformity? If so, why do they assault the would-be conformist Turkey? The lurid pseudo-expressionism of the sequences in which they appear doesn't make any sense to me, rationally or emotionally. Nor do the Galasso brothers. (Why, if they are so strong for the Wanderers, and so strong period, do they run away from the Duckie Boys?) Nor does Joey's father. (If he hates his son so much, why does he stay and fight the Duckie Boys?)

Susan Morrison argues that *The Wanderers* locates "its participants firmly within an historical framework," but to me the film's various incoherencies do more to misrepresent early '60s reality than does a coherent (if conservative) film like *American Graffiti*. It could be argued that *The Wanderers*' rapid shifts of mood and style work to reflect the unsettled nature of the times (as in Arthur Penn's much superior *Four Friends*, or, on a lesser plane of achievement, the more-absurd-than-Kaufman *Five Corners*). It is characteristic of *The Wanderers*' director that he explicitly employs the death of John Kennedy as a means of reuniting Richie and Despie, while Penn implicitly evokes it (and the other assassinations of the 1960s as well), in a much more complex way, with the father's assassination of his daughter in *Four Friends*. Kaufman's use of Kennedy's death gives *The Wanderers* a shot (unearned by the film) of emotion, and seems to suggest that Kennedy's death worked to box in (as Morrison

comments) Richie's future (and by extension the nation's). Danilo's traumatic separation, in *Four Friends*, from his bride and her family (and also from friends of his like Georgia) better evokes, I think, the true effect of the '60s public deaths.

Other complaints about *The Wanderers* could and somewhere (lest this decidedly minor work — not without its virtues — find a place in the canon it doesn't deserve) should be made (at times — as with the awkward materialization of the Linda Manz character in the middle of Richie's farewell to Joey and Perry — Kaufman's very ability to build a narrative seems questionable). More relevant to *CineAction!* is the film's failure as social criticism (the boys' sexism is never really placed by the film, as can be seen in its celebratory presentation of "elbow-tit" gaming, or, more arguably, in its development of Nina, who remains throughout her scenes an engaging cipher) or social history.

• Bryan Bruce's interesting comparison of two outstanding films, Kaplan's *Over the Edge*, and Hunter's *River's Edge*, in his article "The Edge," makes in passing several small points I must dissent from, points which ultimately lead to one major topic *CineAction!* might be interested in doing more work on.

To take the problems as they come: my first viewings of the two films occurred in exactly opposite locales from Bruce's: *Over the Edge* in a Berkeley art/revival house (the audience of which found the film funny); *River's Edge* in a grind house on San Francisco's Market Street (whose normally jaded clientele were stunned and, judging from comments I overheard after the film, sought reassurance that its events had "really happened," almost interestingly, as a distancing device). (!) Unlike Bruce I can't see the validity of drawing conclusions about these films from the audiences I happened to see them with, although the reactions of the total of four different audiences he and I experienced are interesting. I also can't agree with him that the films were necessarily aimed at different

"Target audiences," although it is true that *River* has more "art film" signifiers than *Over*. Both Kaplan and Hunter took the distributor, and the ad campaign, they could get. The "'A' art film" quality of *River* owes more to Hunter's directorial sensibility than to a plan he had to position the film for adult tongue-cluckers.

I also disagree with Bruce's notion that *River* features a cast of "stars." This opinion may be due to more ignorance on my part of '80s teen films than I should admit. Before *River's Edge* I, at the least, had never seen two of the film's "recognizable teen actors" (Zal and Roebuck) before, while Crispin Glover — a teen actor? — presented a very different persona in *River's Edge* than he had in *Back to the Future*. In the event, the central figures in *River* turn out to be then-unknowns Keanu Reeves and Ione Skye (Leitch) — and if *River* turns out to be star-making for them as *Over the Edge* was for Matt Dillon (who was privileged, in his martyr's role, by that film), so much to the good. As for Dennis Hopper, it is a credit to Hunter's intelligent direction that Hopper is as subtle as he is in *River's Edge* — students of classical direction can profitably compare his fine work there with his unbearable hamminess in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, which performance Bruce prefers.

I am sympathetic to Jonathan Kaplan, a talented director, but I'd suggest that if (as I think it is) *Over the Edge* is by far Kaplan's best film, it may well be due to Tim Hunter's screenwriting contribution. While Kaplan does bring to *Over* the qualities Bruce discerns in his other work, Kaplan's work rises and falls more than Hunter's does with the screenplays he has to work with — as viewers of Kaplan's most recent film, *Project X* (1987), can testify. That film, to be sure, remains thematically consistent with Bruce's model of Kaplan's work. Instead of pitting "exploitative landowners," *Project X* pits the military/scientific establishment against a *chimp*. A chimp who is, I guess, perhaps Kaplan's ultimate "'punk' . . .

'fucked over' by the system" who starts "fighting back." I'm not keen, here, on mocking the animal rights movement (with which I am in sympathy, as indeed I also am with Kaplan's decent "liberal Spielberg" movie). But I think it is Hunter who has built up a more substantial body of work, and the sequence *Over the Edge-Tex-Sylvester-River's Edge* bears more scrutiny than Kaplan's (ultimately liberal, not radical) "agit-prop."

This is because Hunter, virtually alone in the contemporary American cinema, is working in the almost completely lost tradition of Hollywood "classicism," the "classicism" Bruce refers to without labeling it as such when he refers to Hunter's balanced, "carefully rendered, contemplative compositions" and positions (positions in their deliberate complexity Bruce finds "clouded.") Hunter may be the last example of a new *auteur* director. I am told that Hunter has said his approach to *River's Edge* was patterned after Lang and Preminger. Hunter's own film criticism (some examples of which are to be found in his co-authored contributions to Agel's *The Making of 2001* and Coursodon's *American Directors*) is very much in the classical *auteurism's* liberal humanism as well. He is neither a politically-orientated rebel against our times, nor, like a Spielberg, does he endorse them. It is a measure of the clear-eyed bleakness with which Hunter views our late '80s society just how "out of date" this director, with his old-fashioned qualities, seems.

Looked at in one way *River's Edge* demonstrates the transfixed, "non-political" despair of liberal humanism today. But should this surprise us? At the risk of caricaturing a complex and well-thought out position, isn't Clear-Eyed Bleakness About Life exactly what the classicism celebrated by such *auteur* critics as Robin Wood (at that time) was all about? (Recall Wood on *Rio Bravo* and the darkness outside that jail.) That could be the voice of a hypothetical modern humanist writing about *River's Edge* except in that

film there is no "jail" to be safe (human) in. As Bruce puts it, the film's "description of the modern 'condition,' while perhaps accurate, is delivered as beyond redemption."

• But then again this is not so. Hunter's films ultimately demonstrate enough (essentialist) faith in the redemptive human values of brotherhood and love to warm any old liberal humanist's heart (if there were any left in any substantial organ of opinion to recognize this). Reeve becomes one of the film's two moral centers (Hopper of course — the true carrier of "'60s values" — is the other), a heterosexual couple of the two "redeemable" teens comes into being, and, perhaps most crucially, the two brothers are reconciled. The closure of *River's Edge* remains, however, on a corpse;

the film's positive ending is a very tenuous one. Bruce, and even more than Bruce, Janine Marchessault (in her article "Your Life is a Film") point out some of the problematics of this position of Hunter's. *River's Edge* is either the last film of an old cycle ("nothing but another moral tale" — Marchessault) or the first film in a new cycle (humanism redeemed through rigorous "realism"). "Clear-eyed humanism" or "a corpse's gaze?" I don't think the self-referential representational strategy ("distinguishing between itself and the actual event") Marchessault argues for is the answer. Post-modernism is part of the problem, not the solution.

— Gregg Rickman

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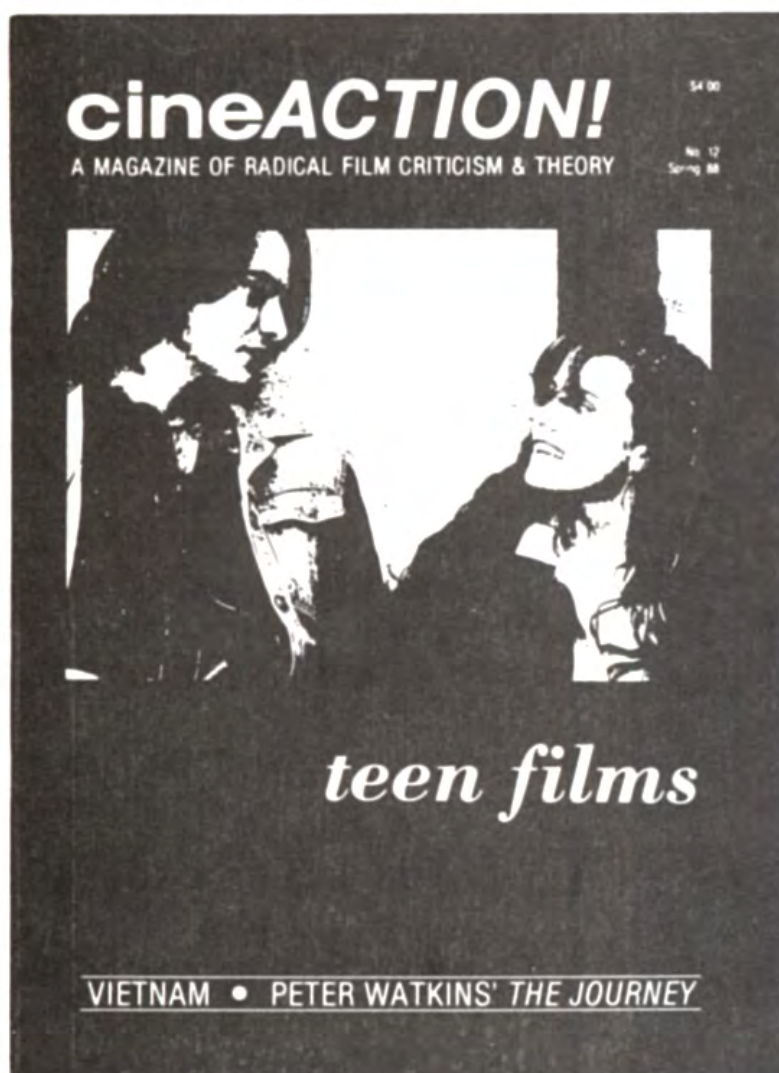
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The Big Heat: Glenn Ford



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THE BIG SLEEP
OUT OF THE PAST / DUEL IN THE SUN
PHANTOM LADY
ANGEL FACE
WOMAN IN THE WINDOW / SCARLET STREET
THE BLUE GARDENIA
THE BIG HEAT / RANCHO NOTORIOUS
THE WILD BUNCH